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A Gospel Vision of Welfare: Faith in Action



My brothers and sisters, I am grateful for this opportunity to visit with you about a gospel vision of the priesthood principles of welfare in the restored Church of Jesus Christ.

The economic clouds that have long threatened the world are now fully upon us.

The impact of this economic storm on our Heavenly Father's children requires a gospel vision of welfare today more than ever before. Priesthood-based welfare principles are both temporal and spiritual. They are also eternal and apply in every circumstance. Whether we are rich or poor, they are for us.

Whenever we practice the principles of welfare, we are living "pure religion" as it is defined in scripture (James 1:27). The Savior taught, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matthew 25:40). He also taught that we not only seek out and "visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction" but we also "keep [ourselves] unspotted from the world" (James 1:27). In other words, we not only *do* good; we strive to *be* good.

This, then, is the gospel vision of welfare: to put our faith in Jesus Christ into action. We serve others as the Spirit directs. As we live gospel welfare principles, we apply the Savior's teachings here in mortality.

What, then, are these principles of welfare? How can we apply them as spiritual and temporal building blocks in our daily lives?

PROVIDENT LIVING AND SELF-RELIANCE

The first building block may be described as provident living. This means joyfully living within our means and preparing for the ups and downs of life so that we can be ready for the rainy-day emergencies when they come into our lives.

Provident living means not coveting the things of this world. It means using the resources of the earth wisely and not being wasteful, even in times of plenty. Provident living means avoiding excessive debt and being content with what we have.

We live in an age of entitlement. Many believe they should have all that others have—right now. Unable to delay gratification, they go into debt to buy what they cannot afford. The results always affect both their temporal and spiritual welfare.

When we go into debt, we give away some of our precious, priceless agency and place ourselves in self-imposed servitude. We obligate our time, energy, and means to repay what we have borrowed—resources that could have been used to help ourselves, our families, and others.

As our freedom is diminished by debt, increasing hopelessness depletes us physically, depresses us mentally, and burdens us spiritually. Our self-image is affected, as well as our relationships with our spouse and children, with our friends and neighbors, and ultimately with the Lord.

To pay our debts now and to avoid future debt require us to exercise faith in the Savior—not just to *do* better but to *be* better. It takes great faith to utter those simple words, "We can't afford it." It takes faith to trust that life will be better as we sacrifice our wants in order to meet our own and others' needs.

I testify that happy is the man who lives within his means and is able to save a little for future needs. As we live providently and increase our gifts and talents, we become more self-reliant. Self-reliance is taking responsibility for our own spiritual and temporal welfare and for those whom Heavenly Father has

entrusted to our care. Only when we are self-reliant can we truly emulate the Savior in serving and blessing others.

It is important to understand that self-reliance is a means to an end. Our ultimate goal is to become like the Savior, and that goal is enhanced by our unselfish service to others. Our ability to serve is increased or diminished by the level of our self-reliance.

As President Marion G. Romney once said: “Food for the hungry cannot come from empty shelves. Money to assist the needy cannot come from an empty purse. Support and understanding cannot come from the emotionally starved. Teaching cannot come from the unlearned. And most important of all, spiritual guidance cannot come from the spiritually weak” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1982, 135; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1982, 93).

PAYING TITHES AND OFFERINGS

How, then, do we obtain Heavenly Father’s help so that we have enough for our own needs and also enough to serve others? One of the fundamental principles of welfare is the payment of tithes and offerings.

The primary purpose of tithing is to develop our faith. By keeping the commandment to pay “one-tenth of all [our increase] annually” (D&C 119:4), we become better—our faith grows and sustains us through the trials, tribulations, and sorrows of life.

With the payment of tithes, we also learn to control our desires and appetites for the things of this world, to be honest in our dealings with our fellowmen, and to make sacrifices for others.

As our faith grows, so will our desire to keep the commandment to pay fast offerings. This offering is at least the cost of the two meals we do not eat while we are fasting. Fast offerings are the means provided for us to participate in anonymous giving to bless our brothers and sisters in spiritual and temporal need—giving with no expectation of earthly credit or benefit. Freely giving allows us to follow the pattern of the Savior, who freely gave His life for all mankind. He said, “Remember in all things the poor and the needy, the sick and the afflicted, for he that doeth not these things, the same is not my disciple” (D&C 52:40).

As true disciples of Christ, we also give as did the good Samaritan, who boldly rescued his unknown brother on the highway side (see Luke 10:25–37). Said Joseph Smith, “A man filled with the love of God, is not content with blessing his family alone, but ranges through the whole world, anxious to bless the whole human race” (*History of the Church*, 4:227).

PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

As Latter-day prophets have counseled, some of the most important welfare building blocks have to do with preparing for the future.

Budgeting

Preparing for the future includes making a spending and savings plan with our income. Carefully making and keeping a family or personal budget can help us recognize and control the difference between our wants and needs. Reviewing that budget in a family council will allow our children to learn and practice wise spending habits and to participate in planning and saving for the future.

Education

Preparing for the future also includes obtaining an education or vocational training and finding gainful employment. If you are currently employed, do all that you can to be a valued, essential part of the organization you work for. Work hard and be a “labourer . . . worthy of [your] hire” (Luke 10:7; see also D&C 31:5; 70:12; 84:79; 106:3).

As companies continue to downsize or close, even ideal employees may find themselves needing to find new employment. This is an opportunity to rely on the Lord, to grow, and to be strengthened. If you are seeking a new job, increase your faith in the Lord’s desire and power to bless you. Also seek counsel from those you trust, and don’t be afraid to network and ask for help in finding a new job. If necessary, change your lifestyle—and possibly your place of residence—to live within your means. Willingly seek additional training and learn new skills, regardless of your age. Maintain your health and stay close to your spouse and children. And, above all, be grateful. Express your gratitude in prayer for all that has been given to you.

Heavenly Father loves you. His Son has promised, “All these things shall give [you] experience, and shall be for [your] good” (D&C 122:7).

Spiritual Preparation

My brothers and sisters, now is the time to lay the building blocks of welfare in our lives and teach our brothers and sisters to do the same. The scriptures teach us, “If ye are prepared ye shall not fear” (D&C 38:30). By keeping the commandments and living welfare principles, we can have the Spirit of the Lord to be with us always—to sustain us through the storms of these last days and speak peace to our souls.

Just as we save our temporal resources for rainy days, keeping the commandments, praying, reading the scriptures, and relying upon the Holy Ghost prepare us for the rainy-day tests of life. By our obedience, we store up the faith we need to meet the vicissitudes and challenges of life. Keeping ourselves unspotted from the world—being “good” in this way—we are able to do good for our brothers and sisters throughout the world, both temporally and spiritually.

In closing, may I share just one example of how we do this in humanitarian service?

Every year Church members contribute to the digging of wells where there is no other source of drinking water. Consider the benefit of just one of these wells, dug in a remote village. While some might characterize it as a strictly temporal blessing, what are the spiritual blessings to a mother who had previously walked hours to get water and more hours to bring it back to her children? Before the well was dug, what time did she have to teach her children the gospel, to pray with them, and to nurture them in the love of the Lord? What time did she have to study the scriptures herself, ponder them, and receive strength to bear the challenges of her life? By putting their faith into action, Church members helped quench the temporal thirst of her family and also provided a way for them to drink freely of the water of life and never thirst again. By being faithful in living welfare principles, they were able to help dig “a well of water springing up into everlasting life” (John 4:14).

I testify that living the priesthood principles of welfare is the measure of our Christian love. It is our sacred opportunity to apply Christ’s restored gospel on earth—to put our faith into action and receive a fulness of His joy in this life and in the world to come.

I bear my special witness that our Savior lives and that He gave His life for our eternal welfare. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.