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All Things in Wisdom and Order

The prize is not won by running fast but by moving forward in wisdom.

As a young man growing up in Idaho trying to find my place in the world, I arrived at the following temporary conclusion: I was a better French horn player than Wilt Chamberlain, the best player in the National Basketball Association, and I played basketball better than Dennis Brain, then the world’s premier French horn player. I felt I was unique and, by implication, uniquely good.

This bit of vanity seems harmless, but it hints at a trap into which many of us fall—judging our individual worth by comparing ourselves to others. This view of self-worth results in one of two serious mistakes: either we imagine ourselves better than we are because we think we excel where others fail; or we are too hard on ourselves, thinking we do not measure up to others. Faced with these misperceptions, we may settle into a false sense of self-satisfaction, strain to match the accomplishments of those we believe are ahead of us, or give up altogether. Our vision is clouded when we forget we are not in competition. As children of our Father in Heaven, we are already unique and valuable, beyond anything we can achieve in this world.

Wise Counsel from a King

How can we avoid this trap? King Benjamin offered wise counsel. In his final discourse, this Nephite king told his people what his years as head of state and as a prophet had taught him. First, he accounted for his ministry and admonished his people to do their duty toward their Heavenly Father and others (see Mosiah 2). Then he prophesied of the mortal ministry of the Savior (see Mosiah 3), spoke of Christ’s Atonement as “the means whereby salvation cometh” (Mosiah 4:8), and explained how to obtain this gift from God. He also spoke at length of the people’s duty to the poor (see Mosiah 4).

Then the aged king offered this counsel: “And see that all these things are done in wisdom and order; for it is not requisite that a man should run faster than he has strength. And again, it is expedient that he should be diligent, that thereby he might win the prize; therefore, all things must be done in order” (Mosiah 4:27).

With these simple words King Benjamin explained how to be faithful and act correctly in the face of competing demands. To “win the prize” we must be diligent, while acting



within the limits of our capacity and circumstances. There are at least five guiding principles contained in this counsel from King Benjamin: duty, persistence, capacity, balance, and priority and seasonality.

Duty

“All things must be done”: Those who accept the blessings of the gospel are bound by covenants to act in certain ways. We have general duties—nurturing our children, serving others, keeping the commandments—and we have specific duties that arise out of our own choices, the Church callings we receive, the promises we make, and the obligations we freely accept. The counsel to not “run faster than [we have] strength” does not excuse us from these things.

Persistence

“Be diligent”: The Lord said, “He that endureth to the end shall be saved” (Matthew 10:22). We sometimes mistakenly think the word *endure* means grim plodding in the face of adversity. Not so. While mortality was not meant to be free of challenges, the Lord has promised both peace and happiness in this life and unimaginable blessings in the life to come for “them that love him” (1 Corinthians 2:9). But these blessings come to those who truly take upon themselves the name of Christ, remaining true to Him and following after Him. To



BE WISE

Brothers and sisters, be wise with your families. Be wise in fulfilling your

Church callings. Be wise with your time. Be wise in balancing all of your responsibilities. O be wise, my beloved brothers and sisters. What can I say more?

Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “O Be Wise,” *Liahona and Ensign*, Nov. 2006, 20.

persist or persevere means to remain on the path. Those who do so find, to their delight, that the journey brings moments of surprising joy and great blessings, even as the way grows rocky or steep.

Capacity

“A man should [not] run faster than he has strength”: We are all bound to honor our covenants, but all are not asked to carry the same load. The parable of the talents and the story of the widow’s mite teach that we will not be judged by our output (see Mark 12:41–44; see also

Matthew 25:14–30). Our charge is to magnify what we are given by the Lord, however large or small it may be. We each possess different gifts, abilities, and capacities. That we are to use them in the service of others is King Benjamin’s main message, and it is a persistent theme throughout the scriptures. There is nothing, however, in the revelations to suggest that modest results from heartfelt effort are less valued in the economy of heaven than greater or more impressive results. We are to thrust in *our* sickle with *our* might, thereby bringing salvation to *our* souls (see D&C 4:4; 6:3; 11:3; 12:3; 14:3).

Balance

“Done in wisdom”: Hardest of all is achieving the right mix or balance between competing good things. No secret



formula will achieve this for us. We must avoid the “false balance” (Proverbs 20:23) that becomes a mere excuse for avoiding difficult choices. Self-awareness—an honest assessment of our strengths and weaknesses—is critical. Then righteous living, thoughtful meditation, and heartfelt prayer place us in the path of heavenly inspiration as we make daily decisions. The counsel of those who love us helps us find our way in a world increasingly filled with enticements, distractions, false promises of pleasure, and empty rewards of worldly achievement at the expense of heavenly blessings. The right balance is probably different for each person and also changes for each person over time. Above all, a person grounded in the gospel of Jesus Christ and enjoying the sweet companionship of the Holy Ghost will find balance, even—or especially—in the face of overwhelming, unavoidable burdens.

Priority or Seasonality

“*All things . . . in order*”: The writer of Ecclesiastes taught, “To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven” (Ecclesiastes 3:1). While we should not “procrastinate the day of [our] repentance” (Alma 13:27), we can safely organize our lives so that, instead of trying to do everything at once, we do many things over time. An extraordinary mother of 12 children wrote: “We cannot do everything, all the time, all at once. We can, through the years, do many things, at different times, one at a time. It is important

to see choices as opportunities, not as frustrations.”¹

How can Church members help one another in this effort? A wise bishop will take into account a family’s circumstances before calling the able sister to serve as Relief Society president at a time of great, if temporary, stress. And the wise young mother or her husband will not withhold from the priesthood leader circumstances that might diminish her ability to serve or that would interfere with other, more important obligations. To ask the leader to take such things into account is not the same as declining to serve. Even those who earnestly seek the inspiration of heaven in extending callings need to know what is happening in your life to “study it out in [their] mind[s]” (D&C 9:8). The calling to preside, whether in a Church calling or in the home, carries with it the responsibility to preside in wisdom.

Our “seasons” may include discovery, training, starting and raising a family, caring for parents, and helping with grandchildren. Each has its own demands. We may at various times be called upon to lead and to follow, to bear great burdens and to sustain others who carry burdens. Inappropriate or irrational concern for how our efforts compare to the accomplishments of others will result in unnecessary frustration and spiritual decline. Diligent attention to *our* duties, *our* inspired choices, and recognition of *our* limits will enable us to “win the prize.” ■

NOTE

1. Jaroldeen Edwards, *Things I Wish I'd Known Sooner . . .* (1991), 19–20.