

A MOVING TARGET

With the right help, you too can accomplish amazing feats of skill and daring!

By David Dickson

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Sometimes keeping up with the many different demands on your time can feel like trying to maintain your footing on a balance beam . . .

In a hurricane.

Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles was once asked how to keep home life, work life, and family life in balance. His answer was probably unexpected.

"You can't," he said. "So don't worry about it."¹

After a short chuckle, Elder Bednar offered some clarification. "Balance is a false notion," he taught. "You can only do one thing at one time."

He then compared balancing various areas of our lives to an acrobat's spinning multiple plates on the ends of sticks. Each plate requires regular spinning so that it won't wobble and fall.

ONE BY ONE

"Can [the acrobat] get all the plates spinning at exactly the same speed at exactly the same time?" Elder Bednar asked. "Nope. One is always closer to spinning off."

"That's life," Elder Bednar continued. He explained how each of us must keep our various plates in the air by giving them attention as needed.

He also included a caution: "It's probably the case that you cannot spin 17 plates. With the help of the Holy Ghost . . . we can identify the two, three, or four most important plates that always need to be spinning."

If your life feels chaotic and overscheduled, consider that caution from an Apostle. You might need to reduce the number of plates you're trying to keep in motion.

Even after simplifying your life, however, it can still be tough to know how best to divide up your time and energy. That's where one particular word comes in handy.

FIRST THINGS FIRST

Let's consider the word *priority* for a moment.

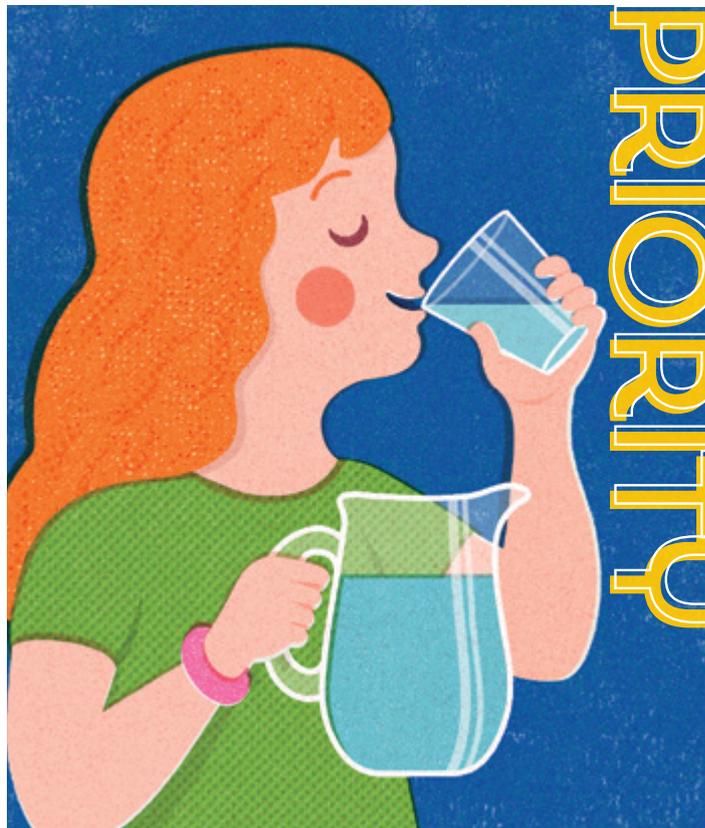
First, pretend you've been outside on a hot summer's day for a long time without water. Maybe you were hiking, playing sports, or just goofing off in the sun. However you imagine it, what you're focused on right now is your incredible thirst—the kind of thirst where your mouth feels like it's been swabbed out with a bag of cotton balls.

So what's the first thing you'd do when you come home? The answer should be pretty clear. You'd take a loong, cold drink of water. And then perhaps fill up your glass again.

Note that you'd find and drink water *before* doing anything else, even if you had a full schedule of activities and were running late. Why? Because it was your top priority.

The word *priority* simply means something you do *prior* to (before) something else. In extreme thirst situations, every other task lines up behind getting a drink of water. Text messages can wait. Homework can wait. Pretty much everything else can wait.

Simple enough, right? But we have a knack for making it more complicated in other situations.



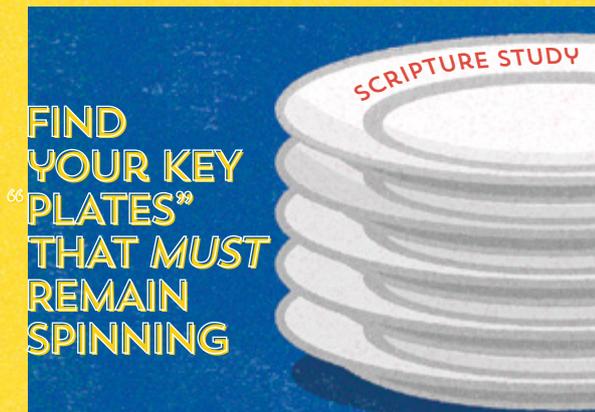
WHEN PRIORITIES AREN'T PRIORITIES

It's one thing to *declare* something a priority. It's quite another to *treat* it as such. For example, someone might *say* that reading scriptures is a top priority. But if scripture study doesn't fit in their schedule

most days, or if it doesn't get squeezed in until the last few minutes of the day before they collapse exhausted into bed, then it's not a *priority* in the real sense of the word.

Once you decide your top priorities—those few key “plates” or areas in your life that *must* remain spinning—do everything you can to schedule them in and don't let anything else bump them out of the schedule.

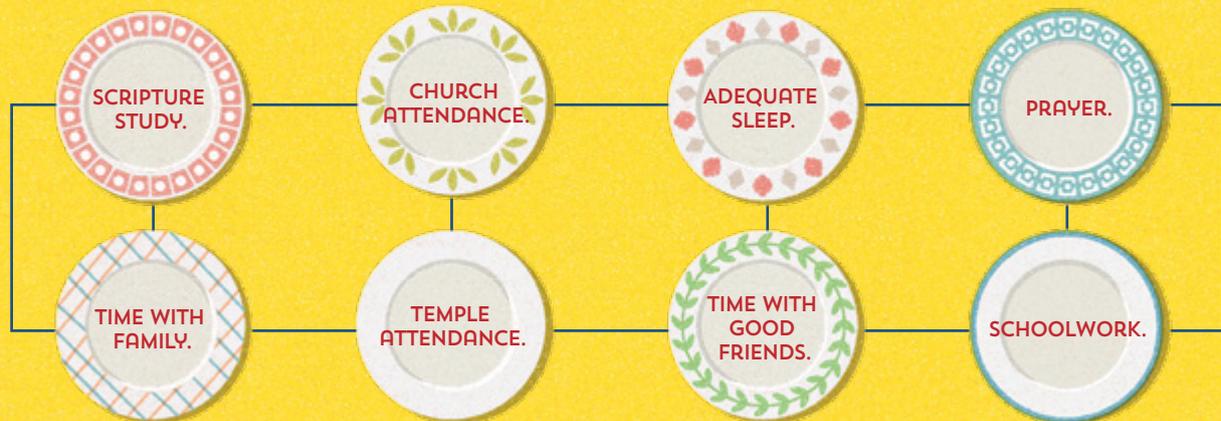
The new Children and Youth program offers a great structure for this approach. As a starting point in personal growth, you might ask yourself: What's the one thing (the top priority) you want to do in each of the four areas of focus? How can you best prioritize your time and energy in these areas?



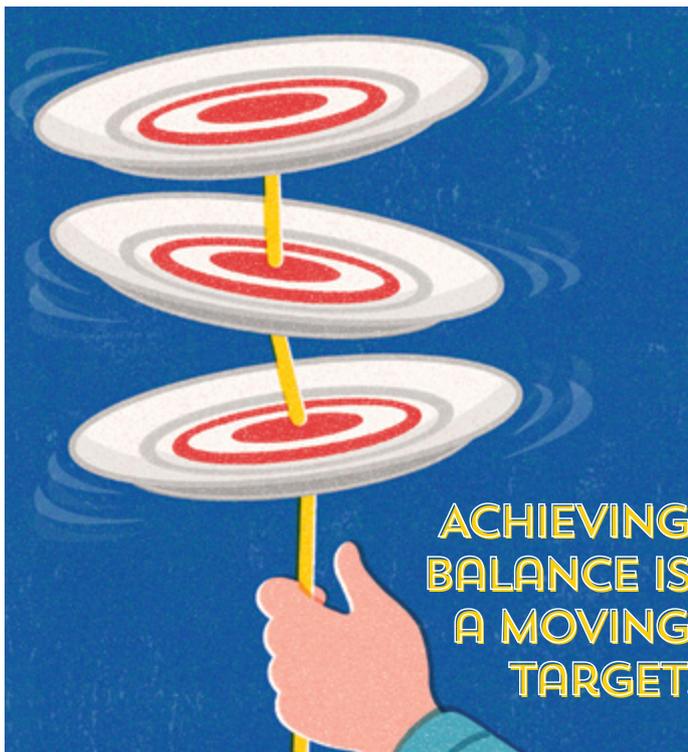
WHICH PLATES TO SET DOWN?

As Elder Bednar suggested, you might need to drop or trim a few less important items in order to keep the essential areas of your life going strong. So how do you make such choices?

You can start by praying for guidance on what to let go. Occasionally, it can help to begin by listing things you don't want to lose or reduce. Some of these nonnegotiables might be:



After you prayerfully identify the things you don't want to cut out, can you then find other areas where you might step back a bit?



THE MOVING TARGET

One more thought: Balance isn't a one-and-done effort. It's not something you can craft into a well-oiled machine that will then hum away uninterrupted for the rest of your life.

Instead, each phase of your life will require unique focus and adjustments. Your balance of time and energy as a high school student will be much different than as a college student, missionary, spouse, or young parent. It's a moving target. You have to move with it simultaneously.

For example, there will most likely come a day when you don't have to spin the homework plate much at all anymore. But before you high-five your future self, know that there will be another equally important plate to take its place.

Plates will come. Plates will go. Either way, you'll always have plenty to keep in the air. With Heavenly Father's help, you can know how best to choose which plates to focus on.

Just take a deep breath and keep on spinning. **NE**

NOTE

1. David A. Bednar, priesthood leadership meeting, Buenos Aires, Argentina, Feb. 2016; see also Marianne Holman, "Finding Balance," *Church News*, Oct. 23, 2010, 5.