

Seeking a Balanced Life

DONALD L. HALLSTROM

I feel privileged to be in Provo for the August 2017 commencement exercises of Brigham Young University. My dear wife, Diane, deeply wished that she could be here, but a long-planned family obligation prevented that. Diane and I met on this campus forty-six years ago. I had just returned from my mission to England and was resuming my studies here. Just a few weeks into the fall semester, I was asked by my mission president—who was still in England—to speak at his home ward in Bountiful. I had so recently returned from my mission that perhaps I was uncomfortable without a companion, so I called a young woman in my student ward whom I had seen but never met and asked her to accompany me. That first date turned into a courtship and then an engagement, and last month Diane and I celebrated our forty-fifth wedding anniversary. The year after our marriage we both received degrees from this institution—Diane while almost nine months pregnant. Coming back to where it all began is a profound privilege.

As a member of the Brigham Young University Board of Trustees for more than

five years, I have regularly been engaged in discussions and decisions about this university. Continually I have been inspired by how deeply the Lord and His prophets care about the youth of the Church and how willing they are to provide enormous sacred resources to assist in temporal and spiritual education. You are blessed to have this university, and it is blessed to have you!

I have great respect for President Kevin J. Worthen. Since his appointment three years ago, we have been in board and executive committee meetings twice each month. He has a brilliant mind, he is modest in his leadership style, and he is completely loyal to the Lord and to the leaders of the Lord's Church. We are extremely fortunate to have an individual of President Worthen's quality leading this university. His complete desire is to do it the Lord's way!

Donald L. Hallstrom, a General Authority Seventy of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, delivered this commencement address on August 17, 2017.

Since Diane and I matriculated on this campus four and a half decades ago, it has become more ethnically and culturally diverse, reflecting what has occurred in the Church during this period. We have been to most of the countries and states that you call home. Yes, there are cultural and socioeconomic differences in the places you come from, and that variety is part of the strength of this university; however, do not forget—in the way that matters most—we are all the same. We are all children of the same eternal Father. That understanding is what makes BYU truly special, as it provides the spiritual foundation that gives academic efforts perspective and importance.

To you graduates, I say, “Congratulations!” and “Well done!” However, I emphasize there is a reason this event is called commencement and not conclusion. Yes, it may conclude your formal education, at least on this campus, but it is the beginning of a new season of life. You may find that exciting, and you may find it a little overwhelming, but, in any case, it is going to happen. You are moving on to new ventures, and hopefully they will exemplify progression in your life’s goals.

Today, fully understanding that this graduation event is not about me and that you will likely remember little, if any, of my message, I want to be relatively brief, I want to be practical, and I want to be clear. Considering your future, I will speak about priorities and seeking balance in your life. You will leave this institution, and some of you will go on to further formal education. Some will begin your professions. Some of you will do both, simultaneously. Many of you leave married—several of you with children. You have held Church responsibilities, some quite demanding, and you will continue to do so. Life, if anything, will become even more complex, more demanding, and—if lived well—even more rewarding.

Before my thirtieth year I was called to be the bishop of an 850-member ward in

Honolulu, Hawaii. Two weeks prior, I had cofounded a company that had just hired and was responsible for many new employees. At the time, Diane and I had three active children, ages one to seven. The daunting responsibilities to properly care for my young family and the Saints entrusted to my stewardship, all in the midst of creating a viable business, seemed impossible. Would I know how to allocate my time when any one of these three important and complex aspects of life could become all-consuming? Was it possible to achieve a balance?

In those days I often recalled a childhood memory. When I was a boy, *The Ed Sullivan Show* was one of the most popular programs on television. As a variety show, it featured performers with widely divergent talents. One performer was a man who appeared regularly. Many poles, perhaps a dozen or more, were set up on stage with stacks of dinner plates beside them. This agile individual would spin a plate on top of one of the poles, then move to the next pole and spin a second plate, and then a third and a fourth. As he proceeded down the line of poles, the rotation of the plates on the first and second poles would begin to slow, and the dishes were in danger of falling off and crashing to the floor. Seeing this, the man would quickly run back to those poles and, with a gentle spin, increase the motion that allowed the plates to keep spinning. The excitement of the act was to witness the ability of the performer to expand the number of rotating plates while not letting any fall. Invariably, a point would be reached at which he was not able to keep up. There was a limit to his ability to increase the number and properly care for the plates already in motion. The sight of dishes sliding from their precarious perches and the cacophony as they hit the hard floor vividly proved the point that even the most skilled performer has his limits.

Of much greater consequence, each of us must decide how many “poles” we are able to manage in our life and what they represent.

Some individuals are spinning a single plate with all their effort, ignoring all the other poles. Others are attempting to spin so many simultaneously that the crashing of plates is often heard.

Leading a balanced life is difficult for many. There is not an exact pattern for everyone, and even our own blueprint may change during different phases of our life. However, seeking balance—giving adequate time and effort to each of those things that really matter—is vital to our success in mortal probation. There are certain fundamental responsibilities we cannot neglect without serious consequence.

What are the essential “poles” of our lives? I suggest four:

1. Our love for our Heavenly Father and Jesus the Christ
2. Our care for our family
3. Our service to the Lord
4. Our life’s temporal work

1. Our Love for Our Heavenly Father and Jesus the Christ

The scriptures speak powerfully of this sacred duty. A Pharisee, who was a lawyer, asked, “Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind” (Matthew 22:36–37). Describing it as part of “the doctrine of Christ, and the only and true doctrine of the Father” (2 Nephi 31:21), Nephi taught, “Wherefore, ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ . . . and a love of God” (2 Nephi 31:20).

Our love of the Father and the Son is foundational to everything else. The Savior, representing the Father, is the source of peace (see John 14:27). Love for the Savior is the supreme motivation to keep “in the right way” (Moroni 6:4). Every other aspect of our life is enhanced when we truly love our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ, as we will love ourselves and others more completely. Answers to our most

challenging problems are found only when we love and have faith in Them.

2. Our Care for Our Family

In “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” we read: “Husband and wife have a solemn responsibility to love and care for each other and for their children. . . . Parents have a sacred duty to rear their children in love and righteousness [and to] observe the commandments of God” (*Ensign*, November 1995).

President David O. McKay often liked to quote, “No other success can compensate for failure in the home” (James Edward McCulloch, *Home: The Savior of Civilization* [Washington, DC: Southern Co-operative League, 1924], 42; see *CR*, April 1935, 116). Other prophetic counsel by President Harold B. Lee has taught, “The most important of the Lord’s work you will ever do will be within the walls of your own homes” (“Be Loyal to the Royal Within You,” BYU devotional address, 11 September 1973). Our desires and actions toward our family should be as exemplified by Lehi when he partook of the sweet fruit of the tree of life and immediately was “desirous that [his] family should partake of it also” (1 Nephi 8:12).

For many, properly caring for our family is the *first* area of compromise when other demands arise, as the results of neglect are not always immediately apparent. Nurturing the husband/wife relationship and building a spiritual home requires men and women of vision and commitment.

3. Our Service to the Lord

A natural extension of our love for the Savior is our desire to serve Him. “If thou lovest me thou shalt serve me” (D&C 42:29). The way we serve Him is by serving one another. “When ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God” (Mosiah 2:17). Elder Dallin H. Oaks said, “Service is an imperative for true followers of Jesus Christ” (*Pure in Heart* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1988], 37).

Our time spent in Church and community service may vary during different periods of our life depending on specific callings we receive and on our family circumstances. However, our desire and our availability to serve should never waver.

4. Our Life's Temporal Work

Although temporal work is temporary, it is still important as a support to the other, more long-lasting aspects of life and provides valuable service to others. Again, the family proclamation gives clear direction:

By divine design, fathers are to preside over their families in love and righteousness and are responsible to provide the necessities of life and protection for their families. Mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children. In these sacred responsibilities, fathers and mothers are obligated to help one another as equal partners.

We commend you for obtaining a quality education. Many of you will continue this pursuit. This monumental effort will allow choices in your life's work, and dedication to an honorable profession, properly balanced, will enhance your spiritual life.

These four "poles" must not be neglected. Each needs constant care to fulfill its proper role in making us "whole" (Mark 2:17).

President Gordon B. Hinckley taught:

I think . . . all of us in this Church . . . have a fourfold responsibility. One, they have a responsibility to their families, to see that their families have a measure of their time. . . . None of us can evade that. . . . That is basic and it is fundamental.

If we are employed, we have a responsibility to our employer. We are not at liberty to short-change him. . . .

We have a responsibility to the Lord, of course, to do that which is expected of us as a servant in His house.

And . . . we have a responsibility to ourselves to take some time to do a little meditating, to do a little exercise. . . .

. . . How do you balance them? I don't think that is difficult. I served in many capacities in this Church. I am the father of five children, who were young and growing up when I was serving in those various capacities. . . . We enjoyed life. . . . We just did what the Church expected us to do. There is safety in that program; it's inspired. [TGBH, 33]

As sincere followers of Christ, we must constantly evaluate what is most important. Are we so intensively focused on one pole that the plates atop the others are in danger of falling because of our neglect? Or are we spinning too many plates on too many poles and needing to simplify our life to keep all that truly matters in proper motion?

How do we know if our life is out of balance? Well, most of us just know. We simply need to admit it and exercise the discipline to change, substituting higher values and better habits for those we have been living. We need to follow the counsel of President Spencer W. Kimball to "do it now" before any further damage is caused by our lack of attention to other indispensable parts of life ("Always a Convert Church: Some Lessons to Learn and Apply This Year," *Ensign*, September 1975).

For others, recognition of imbalance may not be so clear. While serving as a stake president, I observed as a member of our stake grew in prominence in the business community. He had a growing family and held positions of responsibility in the Church. All appeared to be in order. Then it became evident that he was paying too high a price for his temporal success. The first indication was his request to be released from all Church callings because of their time conflict with his work-related obligations. Even more alarming, through a series of behavioral problems with his children, priesthood leaders became acutely aware

that basic family duties were being neglected. Communication with his wife and children had deteriorated, as they seldom saw him. When they did, he was usually preoccupied by professional demands or simply too tired for family activities or even meaningful conversation. Only through a tragic and agonizing series of events was this man brought to a realization of the consequences of his actions on his own spiritual health and that of his family.

The answer I found as a young bishop, and which has served me in the ensuing years, was simply that we must thoroughly understand the guiding doctrine and then do our best each day. We organize, prioritize, and live worthy of the spiritual guidance required when making difficult decisions. Often we seek counsel from those closest to us. From time to time we may be out of balance for a brief period as the immediate needs of one portion of our life take *temporary* precedence. When this occurs, we knowingly work through the issue and seek to stabilize ourselves as soon as possible, before the short-term need becomes a long-term trait.

If we are out of balance, we can change. We can delay and be compelled by the tragedy of a failing family or the sorrow of losing our own spirituality. Or we can be attentive and continually nudged by the whisperings

of the Holy Spirit. Seeking balance among the essential responsibilities of life is preparatory to salvation.

We must “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” (Mosiah 4:27). However, to encourage our constant effort, we are counseled, “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). It is my witness that it can be done, and the prize is “eternal life, which gift is the greatest of all the gifts of God” (D&C 14:7).

Most of you already understand the principles I teach today. That is shown by how you are living. For others, perhaps some adjustment might be considered. For all of us, continual focus is required because we live in a world that can confuse us, and societal priorities of material wealth, pleasure, or prestige can overwhelm the simple but profound personal characteristics that each of us must seek.

My dear young friends, we need you—the Lord needs you. And you are needed forever—faith-filled, converted, and covenant keeping. Bless you now, bless you in the critical next season of your life, and bless you forever! In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.