

Be the Best of Whatever You Are

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One of the most inspiring sermons I have had the privilege of hearing was delivered about the time I entered high school in one of our assemblies. Most of that sermon has been forgotten over the years; however, the central theme is vividly remembered. This sermon was delivered by a member of our stake presidency. He was the owner and operator of the local hardware store, a man who was familiar with hand tools, so it was natural for him to talk about the most common one of all—the hammer.

He told a story of a French carpenter in the early 1800s who was having difficulty in his profession keeping his productivity high because of the defective hammers he used. He had trouble keeping the head on the hammer as he worked. He would spend half of his time chasing his flying hammerhead. He tried everything to attempt to keep the head on. He tried to nail it on. He tried to soak it in water. He even tried to glue it. Each process would help only for a short time before he would again find himself chasing the hammerhead. Now, all of the carpenters in the country were having the same problem and all were seemingly content to live with the situation with the exception of this man. He desired to be the best carpenter in all of France, but his efficiency was

limited to the effectiveness of the tools he used. He reasoned that the only way he could become the best was to build a better hammer. Each evening after his working hours, he would ponder and think about what could be done to develop a better hammer. Finally, after years of work, the right concept was discovered. It was a simple solution, but, oh, how workable. The process he developed was to make the bottom of the hammerhead smaller than the top and then drive a wedge into the top of the hammer. As long as the wedge was in place, the hammerhead could not come off. In fact, the more pressure applied to the hammerhead to attempt to have it fly off, the more pressure was on the wedge to keep it in place. He had built the world's greatest hammer. It has become the pattern for most of the hammer manufacturers even to this day. Now, his was not the world's greatest discovery, but in his own field he became the best.

The message and theme of this great sermon given by a member of our stake

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presidency was contained in a poem, only part of which I can remember. It is as follows:

*If you can't be a pine on the top of the hill,
Be a scrub in the valley—but be
The best little scrub by the side of the rill;
Be a bush if you can't be a tree.*

*If you can't be a highway then just be a trail,
If you can't be the sun be a star;
It isn't by size that you win or you fail—
Be the best of whatever you are!*

[Douglas Malloch, “Be the Best of Whatever You Are”]

Let me address myself to three areas where I would like to challenge you to be the best with the great potential our Father in heaven has blessed you with.

The Blessing of Divine Parentage

First, as a child of God. One of the greatest weaknesses in most of us is our lack of faith in ourselves. One of our common failings is to depreciate our tremendous worth. A firm I was associated with sometime ago embarked on a great executive development program at considerable expense to itself. The program was open to all who expressed an interest. All they had to do was sign up. The firm paid the costs and even allowed the employees one hour off from their normal daily work for classroom time—a free opportunity for an education in the art of management. During the two years the program was offered, only 3 percent of the employees signed for the course. I have observed another situation where this 3 percent statistic seems to be somewhat reliable as the number of the divine children of our Father in heaven who have enough faith in themselves to make the effort to do something important with their lives. Now, we are a special group assembled here because of the light and knowledge that have been given to us about our potential. Surely, we could never be

numbered among the 97 percent who are not taking advantage of opportunities. The scriptures tell us of our divine nature. Do you remember what the Psalmist said?

*O Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy name
in all the earth! who hast set thy glory above the
heavens. . . .*

*When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy
fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast
ordained;*

*What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and
the son of man, that thou visitest him?*

*For thou hast made him a little lower than the
angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honor.*
[Psalms 8:1, 3–5]

Have you ever thought of yourself as being a “junior angel”? Brigham Young has further defined our eternal relationship by reporting:

*Things were first created spiritually; the Father
actually begat the spirits, and they were brought
forth and lived with him. . . .*

*I want to tell you, each and every one of you,
that you are well acquainted with God our
Heavenly Father. . . . You are all well acquainted
with him, for there is not a soul of you but what has
lived in his house and dwelt with him year after
year; and yet you are seeking to become acquainted
with him, when the fact is, you have merely forgot-
ten what you did know.*

*There is not a person here to-day but what is a
son or a daughter of that Being. In the spirit world
their spirits were first begotten and brought forth,
and they lived there with their parents for ages
before they came here. . . .*

*We are the sons and daughters of celestial
beings, and the germ of Diety dwells within us. . . .*

*We are all his children. We are his sons and
daughters naturally, and by the principles of eternal
life. We are brethren and sisters. [Discourses of
Brigham Young, com. John A. Widtsoe (Salt
Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1973), pp. 50, 53]*

History has abundantly given evidence of man's potential when he allows himself to be led by the power of the Lord. Do you remember the story of Joseph who was sold into Egypt? He was sent by his father to check on the welfare of his brothers as they tended the flocks. When they saw him coming, they seized upon the opportunity of finding him alone to satisfy the jealousy in their hearts and sold him for twenty pieces of silver to merchants on their way to Egypt. In Egypt, Joseph was purchased by Potiphar, the captain of the guard. Even as a servant in a far-off land, as a slave to a foreigner, he soon distinguished himself. The scriptures record:

And the Lord was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man; and he was in the house of the Egyptian.

And his master saw that the Lord was with him, and that the Lord made all that he did to prosper in his hand.

And Joseph found grace in his sight, and he served him; and he made him overseer over his house, and all that he had he put into his hand. [Genesis 39:2-4]

Joseph's life continued to have its ups and downs. He found himself accused falsely of being unfaithful to his master and was cast into prison. Once again, because of his faithfulness, the Lord provided an opportunity for him to interpret Pharaoh's dream. Joseph was given the opportunity because of this interpretation to serve Pharaoh. He so distinguished himself in this service that he became a ruler in Egypt while being only thirty years of age. Listen to the honor that Pharaoh bestowed upon him:

And Pharaoh said unto his servants, Can we find such a one as this is, a man in whom the spirit of God is?

And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, Forasmuch as God hath shewed thee all this, there is none so discreet and wise as thou art:

Thou shalt be over my house, and according unto thy word shall all my people be ruled: only in the throne will I be greater than thou.

And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, See, I have set thee over all the land of Egypt.

And Pharaoh took off his ring from his hand, and put it upon Joseph's hand, and arrayed him in vestures of fine linen, and put a gold chain about his neck;

And he made him to ride in the second chariot which he had; and they cried before him, Bow the knee; and he made him ruler over all the land of Egypt. [Genesis 41:38-43]

Note the characteristic which distinguished Joseph to both Potiphar and the Pharaoh: "a man in whom the spirit of God is."

We each have the choice of being worldly like unto the brothers of Joseph or living worthy of the blessings of the Lord like unto Joseph. President Romney has said: "We mortals are in very deed the literal off-spring of God. If man understood, believed and accepted this truth and lived by it, our sick and dying society would be reformed and redeemed and men would have peace and eternal joy." With this divine knowledge burning within our souls, surely much will be expected of us. As a child of God, be the best of whatever you are.

The Blessing of Church Service

The second challenge I wish to extend to each of you pertains to service in God's kingdom here upon the earth. One of the most exciting blessings which can come to us as members of our Savior's church is to live in this modern day when the Church is experiencing its greatest period of growth. Each day since the restoration of the gospel there has been greater opportunities for service in the Church than there was the day before. Tomorrow, there will be an even greater opportunity than there is today. Certainly, this is the day spoken of by the ancient prophet when he said:

And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it.

And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths. [Isaiah 2:2-3]

As I travel throughout the stakes of the Church there is always one common cry: "If I only had another bishop like Brother Jones or another Relief Society president like Sister Smith or another Young Adult representative like Sister Brown or another home teacher like Brother Doe, what a difference I could make in my stake." When asked by a group of full-time missionaries recently as to what was the greatest challenge the Church is facing today, I was quick to respond that it is the challenge of growth. I wonder if the only reason that hundreds of thousands more are not embracing the gospel is that we have not yet developed a strong enough leadership base. Then, we too must examine our effectiveness as leaders when only 50 or 60 percent of our families are presided over by fathers active in the Church. Do you see what a great demand there is for qualified leaders in our Father in heaven's kingdom? Now consider the great privilege you are presently receiving to prepare you to be more able kingdom builders as your preparation relates to the instructions of the Lord to us:

Zion must increase in beauty, and in holiness; her borders must be enlarged; her stakes must be strengthened; yea, verily I say unto you, Zion must arise and put on her beautiful garments. [D&C 82:14]

Some labor with the misconception that the professions for which they are preparing themselves will be too demanding to consider a life of major service in the kingdom of God. My experience has been that the greatest teacher is

service in his kingdom. Let me give you an example:

When I was a young man in my late twenties, I was offered the position of controller in a small store in central Idaho after only six months' experience in the retail business. I had about a month in this new position before I could acquire a place or residence for my family to come and join me. During that month, I almost lived at the store. A twenty-four-hour workday was a common occurrence as I attempted to keep up with the work load that I had been assigned. I was having a desperate time trying to learn a new job and to keep pace with the responsibility I had been given. Just after my family arrived and we were settled, a car pulled up in front of our home one evening and I was invited to come out and visit with a member of our stake presidency and a member of our ward bishopric. I was shocked with the announcement that a change was being made in our bishopric and a counselor was being called as the new bishop. He had selected me to be his second counselor. My first reaction was to say, "No, I am too busy." But the training of my parents soon rang louder than my first reaction and I agreed to serve. This first experience in the bishopric was the best education I have ever received in organization and management. I found the Lord's way was transferable to business. As I practiced in business the techniques taught to me in Church service, I became more efficient in my business assignments. I soon found myself with more time for family, Church, and business responsibilities. The second great benefit was the experience of the joy of service in the Church. Next to my family, the most rewarding experiences in my life have been Church service opportunities.

You have been blessed to be born in the most exciting era the Church has ever known. Don't deprive yourself of a most rewarding opportunity of being prepared and willing to serve the Master. As a servant in his kingdom, be the best of whatever you are.

The Blessing and Obligation of Citizenship

The final area I would like to touch on is our obligation to the earth and the nation in which we live. I have just returned from one of the great nations of the world. We were so impressed with the people. How friendly and considerate they were to us. I would tell my wife, "If you want to have fun in this country, go out and get lost. Those people are so great at giving directions when you ask for assistance. They tell you where to go with such detail and then repeat it two or three times to be certain you understand."

This country is in one of its most difficult periods. After suffering during World War II, the people went into a great rebuilding program. As they accomplished and things became easy again, they started to relax and wanted only to enjoy life. Their great interest became the pub and the television. If an industry was in difficulty, rather than attempting to solve the problem, it was much easier and more secure to turn it over to the government and nationalize it. One by one, the government found itself operating more and more businesses. To offset this great national power, the workers organized into national unions and union leadership had so much control that they could paralyze the nation anytime it was to their advantage to call a strike.

A strike was in progress while we were there. Public buildings were required to close down at 10:30 at night. Stores were only allowed to turn on their lights one half of each working day. Shopping in stores during the period without lights was interesting. There would be one light burning at the entrance to the store. As you would step into the selling departments to shop, a salesperson would carry coleman lanterns around to show you the merchandise. In one store we visited, the temperature was 45 degrees. The saleslady explained they had been without heat all winter. The work week was reduced to three days. In hotels, you would find each room equipped

with a candle with a note stating the lights could be turned out at any time. The heat was on in the hotel only during the evening and the early morning hours. Having a haircut was an experience. The barbershop was cold and dark as you entered. The barber seated you in a chair and then ran downstairs to turn on a little handmade generator operated by his former Honda. One neon tube then came on and the barber commenced to cut your hair. I was greatly relieved to go outside after the haircut to see if my head was still in place. On top of all this, the people had to live with the realization that if the strike was allowed to continue two additional weeks, all power would be turned off.

The economic pressures caused the government to fall and a general election was called. This election was held while we were there. It was very interesting to see 85 percent of the voters turn out to cast their ballots. Unfortunately, the election just highlighted problems rather than solving them. There had been such lack of interest for so long that the elections failed to turn up new leadership. The vote was split between the two major parties. One received the popular-vote margin. The second received the greater number of seats in the governing body. Neither had the majority to rule. A small third party was now in control and could bargain for the best deal. The ability to organize the government rested in its hands. Radical leaders could now demand positions of importance and power in the new government far beyond what they were entitled to as representatives of the people.

This is a classic example, to me, of what occurs when complacency and the desire for security supersede the desire for freedom and the willingness to sacrifice for its preservation. I wish that this were just an isolated case of the problems of just one nation. Unfortunately, the cry is being heard from almost all free nations for willing, dedicated, honest leadership to guide them through troubled times.

Now you find yourself at an age when you are expected to make your contribution to the leadership of your nation. I challenge you as a citizen to be the best of whatever you are.

We currently find ourselves in a situation where we have experienced a period of unprecedented prosperity. It has caused us to become soft and spoiled. We have again reached the point where we demand much more than we are willing to give and have become self-centered and worldly. We turn to things of man rather than to things of God.

We know the ultimate outcome of such a course. We know the suffering, bloodshed, sorrow, and despair which will follow if this direction is not changed. Of course, the immediate question that comes to mind when we examine our current state of affairs is why must we be knocked to our knees before we start on the road to recovery. The answer is obvious—the cycle can be reversed at any point. All that is needed is inspired leadership to give direction. Where can we expect to find that leadership today? One cannot stand in the position which I occupy at this present moment without knowing the answer to this question. Look around you. Have you ever seen a more inspiring sight? Do you realize that the person sitting next to you has the potential to become one of the best-trained leaders the world has ever known? In the book of Ether a great truth is given: “In the gift of his Son hath God prepared a more excellent way” (Ether 12:11). Supporting each of you here is a heritage of almost 150 years of continuous revelations to prophets of God preparing you for this great day. We have been promised, “And if your eye be single to my glory your whole body shall be filled with light and there shall be no darkness in you and that body which is filled with light comprehendeth all things” (D&C 88:67). The only missing ingredient to make our contribution as leaders in God’s kingdom is found in the Doctrine and Covenants: “If ye have desires to serve God ye are called to the work; For behold

the field is white already to harvest” (D&C 4:3–4).

There has never been a time in the history of the world when those who are prepared to give honest, inspired leadership have greater opportunity than there is today. Isn’t this the time of those who have been given knowledge of the truth, the light of the gospel, to stop testing the line between right and wrong and enthusiastically embark on that which the Lord has asked us to do? Isn’t this the time in our preparation to do all we have been assigned, and then just a little bit more? Isn’t this the time in our Church service to do all our priesthood leaders would require of us, and then just a little bit more? Isn’t this the time in our nation to fill our responsibilities as good citizens, and then just a little bit more?

My son found it necessary to leave this campus for a few hours this weekend to drive home to negotiate an advance on his allowance. While there, he studied this talk with great interest and decided what it needed was a little poetic flavoring. In about two and a half minutes, he penned these lines of rhyme for our instruction, titled, “To Be the Best of What I Am”:

*I am the best at what I do
and I do all I can.*

*I am the best in at least one thing,
When so I think
then so I am.*

*To serve my fellowman
As President
or plumber*

*The best way that I can,
Brings to me the greatest joy to stay
Through winds of circumstance
may seldom blow my way.*

*I remain a servant of God,
an executor of His righteous plan.*

*To be a child of God
inherently filled with potential
And then to blame whatever fortune may come
on environment
Seems a bit deceitful.*

*I am a child of God
and this one thing I know:
You, too, are a child of God
not on earth for merely show
For you and I came here to grow.*

*I am the best at what I do
and I do all I can.*

*I am the best in at least one thing,
When so I think
then so I am.*

I give you my witness that I know by personal experience that, the more you serve the Lord, the greater are his blessings to you. There is no greater joy than being a builder in his kingdom. I challenge you with all of the great power and potential that is within you to be the best of whatever you are, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.