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Balance: A Perspective of Peace

Elder F. Melvin Hammond
Of the Seventy

My dear brothers and sisters: thank you for inviting me to be with you on this occasion. I realize in part the responsibility that has been placed upon me; therefore, I seek the Spirit of the Holy Ghost to be with me. And, I pray that you, too, will sense my desire and exercise your faith and prayers in my behalf.

This presentation will not be particularly scholarly. It certainly will not be profound. More than anything, it will be an expression of my personal observations and testimony garnered over many years of association with tender souls in and out of the Church.

Today, I would like to talk with you about the concept of balance as a perspective of inner peace. In doing so I feel, as Will Durant so aptly stated it, “like a droplet of spray proudly poised for a moment on the crest of a wave, undertaking to analyze the sea” (quoted by Hugh B. Brown, in a devotional address at Brigham Young University, 25 March 1958).

I refer to balance, not simply as a personality trait, but as an integral wholeness of character and life (Webster’s Dictionary, 1986). Such balance, such harmony is an ingredient that many individuals lack, but when it does exist it produces tranquility, peace, and direction to man. As my model I would like to use the Savior, Jesus Christ, for he was the only example of a perfectly balanced, peaceful life.

The oft quoted scripture found in Ecclesiastes 3:1–8, has long been of interest to me. The Preacher presented a unique blue-print of contrasting “times” which God’s progeny experience while in mortality. To me the uniqueness is not found in the substance of the scripture—for I have a difficult time with such words as, “kill,” “war,” and “hate”—but rather the uniqueness is found in the exquisite balance of life so carefully described by the son of David. Indeed, there is “a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven,” and each individual is ultimately confronted by these “times:” birth, death, to plant, to harvest, to kill, to heal, to break down, to build up, to weep, to laugh, to mourn, to dance, to cast away stones, to gather stones, to embrace, to refrain from embracing, to get, to lose, to keep, to cast away, to rend, to sew, to keep silence, to speak, to love, to hate, war, and peace. Do we not all confront these seasons? And in spite of those which seem so difficult and hard to bear, can we not all agree that “He hath made everything beautiful in his time.” (Ecc. 3:11)

It seems to me that as we face each of the seasons mentioned above there are five personal attributes which we should develop. These attributes make the “whole person.” They are in those who are in harmony with God, man and self. They are basic to the pursuit of inner peace.

First: Know Yourself. During the thirty-three years of his mortal existence the Lord came to know precisely who he was: the Only Begotten Son of Elohim in the flesh (see *Doctrine and Covenants* 93:21). He knew that he was sent to the earth to do the will of the Father (John 4:34). He knew that he was the promised Messiah who had come to give “Living Water” to those of God’s children who would accept the Plan of Salvation and become clean vessels through his atoning sacrifice. With this amazing knowledge of who he was, what he was to do, and why—the Christ was able to move forward, even at great personal cost, accomplishing to the last detail his foreordained mission: that of laying down his own life and taking it up again, so that all mankind could live again as immortal souls (John 5:26).

Now you and I do not possess the same faculties or knowledge that the Son of Man possessed. Neither is our mission the same as

that of the Savior. Ours is to gain experience in the world, but to avoid becoming worldly. It is to subject the flesh to the spirit (3 Nephi 27:27), and become perfect even as our “Father . . . in heaven is perfect.” (Matthew 5:48)

Nor are there two people who are the same. There are tall, short, thin, and stout people, each with differing degrees of perceived beauty—for beauty is only in the eye of the beholder. Even the Lord recognized this when he said, “Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?” (Matthew 6:27).

God’s children vary in intelligence from one another. “And the Lord said unto me: These two facts do exist, that there are two spirits, one being more intelligent than the other; there shall be another more intelligent than they . . . all” (Abraham 3:19). In light of this, I have taken great personal comfort and hope from the following words of the Prophet Joseph Smith, “All the minds and spirits that God ever sent into the world are susceptible of enlargement” (Alma P. Burton, *Discourses of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 268). We can progress intellectually; we can increase in knowledge.

Ultimately, we need to know who we are and what we are. We can know that we are the children of God: born in the spirit as sons and daughters of an Eternal Heavenly Father. We can know that this earth as well as our mortal parents were provided as crucial parts of the express divine purpose of bringing “to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39). When we balance our understanding of our capabilities, weaknesses, and limitations against our eternal potential to become like God we will have come a long way toward achieving that balance which produces inner peace.

Second: Empathize with Others. Do you recall the wonderful scene recounted in 3 Nephi 17 during the visit of the Savior to the people of the Americas following his resurrection? He was preparing to leave. He told them that he would come again the next day. Then he noticed that they were weeping and wanted him to stay with them a little longer. Their emotions touched his tender

heart and he said, "Behold, my bowels are filled with compassion towards you. Have you any that are sick among you? Bring them hither" (3 Nephi 17:6–7). All the sick, the maimed, the halt, the blind, the deaf were brought to him "and he did heal them every one as they were brought forth unto him" (3 Nephi 17:9). Following this great demonstration of his healing power, he commanded that all of their little children be brought to him. And he took them "one by one, and blessed them, and prayed unto the Father for them. And when he had done this he wept" (3 Ne. 17:21–22). Such empathy! Such understanding! Such tenderness! The Savior grasped the feelings, the thoughts, the needs, the righteous desires of all those sweet people and he was completely sensitive to them.

I am afraid that in our every day involvement with people we forget to empathize with them. Perhaps, we have been asked to hear the same problem for the one-hundredth time. Maybe, the same person has come back time and time again and we feel helpless to assist them any more. Are there those who come who seem too weak, too incapable to merit our professional consideration—that they are just be a waste of time? If so, we have become calloused and hard. We feign interest by looking at the person, but we look without really seeing. We listen without hearing. We say the proper words without feeling.

How can we recover those sensitive feelings which stirred our heart strings so long ago when everything was new and we were young and sensitive? Can't we dismiss the "it-is-just-another-case" syndrome and truly sense the sufferings of each individual? Certainly, we can if we will see before us a brother, a sister, or our own child in need. As is so movingly described by Georgie M. Gre in her work, "The Littlest Poem," there is such a need.

"It was a bright Spring day and the third-grade children were all excited about their English assignment. Each child was to write a short poem about 'Mothers'. The child who wrote the best poem would have a gold star placed next to his name on the blackboard.

Three o'clock came: time to read the poem. Debbie was first. "Mothers," she said:

“Mothers buy dresses
 and shoes and things.
 They give us parties and
 rings.
 We wish them a Happy
 Mother’s Day
 We hope Mothers are here to
 stay.”

Bobbie came next:

“Mothers make clown suits
 and lemonades
 And fix sore toes with keen
 band aids;
 But there’s one thing she
 can’t and I wish she could—
 That’s learn to like bugs, like
 Mothers should.”

On down the row they stood up, one by one, until at last there was Roberto Jose Martinez. His eyes were big and searching. “The words do not make rhyme,” he whispered, “I tried very hard but my pencil just put on the paper what I feel in here. I will read it now, but it is very little—it is the littlest, I think.”

“Mothers . . . Mothers make
 . . . well, Mothers make you
 hurt inside . . . when you
 haven’t got one.”

For many days the big gold star shone on the blackboard. The small boy with the sad eyes wondered, each day, how the littlest poem that came out of his heart onto the paper could make such a big gold star for Roberto Jose Martinez.” (quoted by Vaughn J. Featherstone, Tambuli, 1992)

Third: People Involvement. I am always amazed at how personally involved the Lord was with people. He interacted with family members, chosen leaders, complete strangers, even rulers. Each, in turn, was drawn into the web of his unusual influence.

Once, while he ate in the home of Simon, the Pharisee, a woman entered weeping and began to wash the feet of Jesus with her tears and wiped them with her hair. She kissed his feet and anointed them. Simon felt that if indeed Jesus was a prophet he would have known who and what kind of woman it was that touched him, for she was a *sinner*. The Lord knowing the thoughts of Simon, reprimanded him severely for his unforgiving heart and unrighteous judgment. Then he extolled the goodness and kindness of the woman for her beneficent acts to him. Finally, he forgave her for her sins and said to her, "go in peace." (Luke 7:50) Her expressions of repentant adoration of the Son of God brought forgiveness and peace.

While hanging on the hideous cross and suffering excruciating pains, the Savior was still aware of his Mother. With John the Beloved at her side, Mary stood at the feet of her Son. But the concern that he felt for himself at that awful moment was swallowed up by the magnitude of his love for her. Referring not to himself, but to John, he said, "Woman, behold thy son!" Then, turning to his disciple, he said, "Behold thy mother!" From that day on John "took her unto his own home" (John 19:26–27).

What a wonderful lesson Jesus taught on personal involvement. He helped us to learn that occasionally we must rely on others, forgetting pride and independence, allowing those near us to care and provide for our needs. He also taught that true discipleship demands a personal interest and commitment to others even outside the sphere of our own immediate family.

Perhaps, one of the most tender moments of personal involvement occurred on the night that Jesus met for the last time with his apostles. Laying aside his garments, the Savior took a basin of water and began to wash the feet of his disciples, drying them with a towel. Each in turn submitted to the washing of feet from their Master. Then he taught them the principle, "If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet." (John 13:14) He was their Master and their God, but he ministered to them!

Even the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, was drawn into the remarkable influence of the Christ when upon hearing the Savior's testimony of truth, asked, "What is truth?" (John 18:38) In that precious moment Pilate missed the obvious answer to his question for the innocent Lamb of God was himself the proclamation of Truth.

While certainly our various church callings and our many professional assignments are extremely important, may I suggest that the most vital personal involvements ought to begin at home, with our wives and our children. The extent of our influence might well depend on the most simple activities with those dearest to us. I would like to share a personal experience that taught me a great lesson about involvement. This is the way I recorded it in my journal.

"We lay quietly together in the back of our jeep station wagon, listening to the gentle swish of pine branches blown by the wind, the constant buzzing of mosquitoes hovering at the closed windows, watching the hazy twilight gradually deepen into darkness—too exhausted to talk, just watching and listening.

Slowly, I turned my head and looked at the tiny red-headed boy with his eyes barely showing above the top of the flanneled sleeping bag. He was exhausted, but what seven-year old wouldn't have been, I thought, as I mused over the events of the day.

With no trail to follow, the climb into the canyon early that morning had been a hard one. He had held tightly to my hand as we slid our way down the steep slope to the creek below. I had clutched our fishing poles in my free hand and he had carried a canteen of fresh water in his tiny, strong grasp. The sun was bright and warm when we stumbled into the clear water of the stream. The laughter of a moment before changed to shrieks as the shock of the icy water turned our feet blue and made us scramble for relief onto a large rock close by. Quickly we removed our wet tennis shoes and socks and sat for a moment absorbing the warmth.

We fished together. I would cast the line out into the stream and then give the pole to the eager boy at my side. I had never seen such excitement. Every time a fish would strike, the canyon

would echo with shouts of happiness. “Oh Dad,” he exclaimed, “won’t Mother be pleased with this one!” I assured him that he was indeed a great provider, and yes, his mother would be pleased and very proud of him.

The day wore on, much too quickly it seemed to both of us. But with a full limit of nice pan-sized trout and the shadows and coolness of the late afternoon causing us both to tremble slightly, we began the long climb back to the rim above us. He scampered quickly up the mountain ahead of me with a challenging, “Come on Dad! I’ll bet I can beat you to the top.” The challenge was heard, but wisely ignored, for his small frame seemed literally to fly over, under, and around every obstacle. When every step I took seemed ridiculously like my last, he had reached the top and stood cheering me on.

Supper was a scrumptious feast of burned sausages, scrambled eggs—heavily peppered with ashes—squashed bread and butter, with a cup of hot chocolate to wash it all down. Afterward, we sat staring at the flames of our campfire as they consumed the last piece of wood, gradually becoming hot coals and finally ebbing into ashes.

We knelt on our bed, already unrolled and open to receive two tired bodies. His small voice rose heaven-ward in sweet, simple children’s prayer to give benediction to our day.

There was a frantic scramble into the large double sleeping bag, with a good deal of pushing and pulling until finally his little body settled and snuggled tightly against mine for warmth and security against the night.

And now as I looked at my son beside me, I felt a surge of love wash through my body with such force that it pushed tears to my eyes. At that precise moment he rolled over, put his little arms firmly around me and said,

“Dad?”

“Yes, son.”

“Are you awake?”

“Yes, my son, I’m awake.”

“Dad, I love you a million, trillion times!” And immediately he was asleep.

But, I was awake far into the night, expressing my great thanks for such wonderful blessings clothed with little boy bodies.

Now my son is a man with a man’s body and mind. And, yes, we both remember that one moment in time when more than blood taught us that our oneness depended on being together.

Fourth: Sacrifice. One of the most frequently discussed topics in the Church is that of Sacrifice. Yet, with all of our talk, we seem not to perceive the meaning and importance attached to this principle of the gospel.

It is true that most of us have a scriptural basis for accepting the supreme sacrifice of the Savior, Jesus Christ. We basically believe that this atonement was to allow the redeeming blood of Christ to wash away the sins of all those who repent and receive the ordinances of salvation from those who have the proper authority. However, in spite of our acceptance of this doctrine, we may still fail to see the necessity of personal sacrifice in our own lives.

Somehow we lose sight of the fact that to sacrifice actually means to give up something of value in order to receive a thing of greater worth. What we do not understand is that this principle of sacrifice is imperative if we are to receive the greatest blessing of all, Eternal Life.

One of the most famous New Testament scriptures refers to a young man who came seeking counsel from the Lord. His wish was to gain eternal life. He was told that he must keep the commandments. Then Jesus reiterated them for him one by one, to which the young man responded, “All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?” “If thou wilt be perfect,” Jesus said to the young man, “go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me. But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions” (Matthew 19:20–22).

Hearing this injunction Peter said: “Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?” To this

query our Lord replied: “Every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name’s sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life.” (Matt. 19:27,29)

The principle is easily stated: Sacrifice produces faith which in turn produces the knowledge that our sacrifice is accepted by God. The Prophet Joseph Smith stated it in this way: “A religion that does not require the sacrifice of all things never has power sufficient to produce the faith necessary unto life and salvation; for, from the first existence of man, the faith necessary unto the enjoyment of life and salvation never could be obtained without the sacrifice of all earthly things. It was through this sacrifice, and this only, that God has ordained that men should enjoy eternal life; and it is through the medium of the sacrifice of all earthly things that men do actually know that they are doing the things that are well pleasing in the sight of God. When a man has offered in sacrifice all that he has for the truth’s sake, not even withholding his life, and believing before God that he has been called to make this sacrifice because he seeks to do his will, he does know, most assuredly, that God does and will accept his sacrifice and offering, and that he has not, nor will not seek his face in vain. Under these circumstances, then, he can obtain the faith necessary for him to lay hold on eternal life.” (Lectures On Faith, Lecture Number Six, p. 69)

What more can I say? The true test is that we be willing to lay our all on the altar—everything that is earthly, even our own lives if they are required.

In the late fall of 1856 a group of Mormon immigrants began their trek to the great Salt Lake Valley by handcart. In October they became stranded in the Wyoming wilderness by an early winter storm that ultimately cost the lives of more than 200 of their group. Hearing of their awful plight, Brigham Young sent rescue teams to assist them. Three young rescuers, who had ridden ahead of the supply wagons, encountered the Martin Company stalled at the Sweetwater River, too weak to attempt a crossing. “Heroically plunging into the numbing water, the three men began carrying the sick and feeble across. This human fording continued until every person and his cart were safely landed upon the

opposite shore. When told of this valorous service, President Young wept. And while reporting it to the Saints assembled in general conference, declared: “That act . . . will insure David P. Kimball, George D. Grant, and C. Allen Huntington an everlasting salvation in the Celestial Kingdom of God, worlds without end” (Carter E. Grant, *The Kingdom of God Restored*, p. 476).

These three young men had placed everything on the line. They had made the sacrifice. It was accepted. Their reward was made sure.

There are many current examples of such personal sacrifice that I could relate to you, but I believe that the point is made clear that sacrifice or the willingness thereof is essential to obtain eternal life. All of us—you, me, those with whom we work can find the peace of a balanced life when we begin to understand the real meaning of sacrifice.

Fifth: Love Unfeigned. As the Savior walked from Bethany to Jerusalem he went to the top of the Mount of Olives. He looked across the narrow valley of the Kidron, westward to the walled city of Jerusalem and the Holy Temple. What awaited him there he alone could comprehend as he said to the Pharisees, “for it cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem” (Luke 13:33).

Christ knew that the day would soon come when he would enter the city and voluntarily give himself up to those who hated him, submitting to their outrageous cruelties as they mocked him in derision, cast their vile spittle in his face, and smote him with their hands. Then meekly he would subject his body to the cutting sting of the lash and finally in complete humility allow his persecutors to nail him to the awful cross.

Can you tell me why? Why, did he, the Son of God, he who had all power in his hands, submit to such terrible anguish? The answer is because it was He “Who so loved the world that he gave his own life, that as many as would believe might become the sons of God” (*Doctrine and Covenants* 34:3).

His love was completely unfeigned, absolutely genuine and sincere: As He healed the sick on the Sabbath contrary to the Pharisaic interpretation of the Law (Matthew 12:10–13); as he

grasped the hand of the twelve year old daughter of Jairus and raised her from the dead (Mark 5:41–42); as he took the little children in his arms and blessed them (Mark 10:16); as he comforted the woman taken in adultery telling her, “go, and sin no more” (John 8:11); as He kindly prayed to the Father for the Roman soldiers who had nailed his body to the cross, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). All this was His magnificent manifestation of love. To those who followed Him he said, “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another” (John 13:34). Yes, as the Beloved apostle has instructed, “We love him, because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19).

Now, my dear brothers and sisters, I want you to think about this concept of love not as a group but as individuals. We love those who first love us. In the wonderful musical production “The Sound of Music” there is a lyric which says, “A bell is no bell till you ring it. A song is no song till you sing it. And love in your heart wasn’t put there to stay. Love isn’t love till you give it away.” But never dishonestly. Remember, we are speaking about love unfeigned. Adultery, fornication, unfaithfulness of any kind is dishonest, feigned love. Certainly, the idea that adulterers are also liars is true, for their lustful activities are the most vile deceptions of pure love. And their sins will dispel the Spirit of the Lord and they “shall deny the faith and shall fear” (*Doctrine and Covenants* 63:16). Such an awful pronouncement—almost more than the sensitive soul can bear. But true!

A lovely little vignette found in the biography, “LeGrand Richards,” describes an occasion when his wife, Ina, lay very ill in a hospital bed, near death. He was at her side and said, “You can’t leave me. I need you. I’ve told the Lord I can’t live without you.” His strength flowed into her and she rallied. They clung to each other and expressed their love in such tender terms that Nona (their daughter) bowed her head and left the room. Later she said, “I saw such pure love, I felt that I was in the hallowed halls of heaven and that if I raised my eyes I would see the angels.” Truly, this must be what we desire for ourselves, that clinging, burning love, which cannot be broken even in death.

Unfeigned love is action, service, commitment and its expression is reciprocal. In it there is no fear, no mistrust, only a most beautiful peace that subdues all the world and brings us close to Heaven.

Thus we have talked about the attributes of knowing who you are, having empathy for others, interacting personally with people, the sacrificing of all earthly things, and loving honestly and without deceit. These and many other things are the composites which form the peaceful soul of a balanced person.

As you leave this convention and return to the challenges of your own life, you might find this small personal experience helpful. It happened in the mountains near Boulder, Colorado, at a time when I needed more balance in my own life.

“I sat on a high mountain and viewed the world of valleys, plains and cities scattered beneath my lofty gaze. I felt how wonderful it would be to remain there forever, drinking in the beauties of life, high in the freshness of lofty peaks.

A golden eagle soared above my head and my eyes followed his flight as he drifted slowly and gracefully upon the cushions of air from one canyon to the next. How beautiful, I thought, and I imagined myself as the mighty bird floating on its heavenly flight.

As I dreamed, clouds had gathered themselves together into a huge thunderhead which threatened to, disturb my peaceful hour. Hesitantly I prepared to leave, resentful that solitude must be forsaken for the nervous scurry of society which awaited in the valley below. With one last longing look I followed the course of the great aerial monarch. To my utter amazement his giant wings had carried him from the peaceful flow of canyon breezes into the jaws of the maddened storm, as if searching to test his strength against that which was so ferocious. Into the force he flew. Destruction seemed imminent. The storm with that force only nature knows swallowed him up and carried him from my view. I turned to go, the illusion of such grandeur fading in the despair of the moment, but from the far edge of the storm a slender, powerful shape emerged and with huge graceful wings the bird circled until it had risen high—high above all that had challenged it below. He

was the master, he had proven his strength, his mettle and he soared grand and confident.

Now, I turned again and viewed the world below me. The world of men, stormy and threatening, presenting a challenge more formidable than any mountain storm. I squared my shoulders, lifted my head and descended. For what is life except a challenge that brings one either to destruction or to that soaring, elevated position of mastery which I had witnessed today.”

My dear friends and associates, I love you for your goodness, for the efforts you make to bless the lives of Heavenly Father’s children. I pray that your righteousness and your personal balance will bring the same to those who need you in order that they might live peaceably on the earth and throughout eternity.

God lives! The gospel is true! Jesus is the Christ! To follow Him is to have peace, harmony and balance. I testify in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.