

A Journey to Find Balance (Handout #1)

Sometimes when we stop long enough to consider the rapid pace at which we are all running, we are reminded of the revelation Joseph Smith received regarding we “laborers in this last kingdom” when the Lord said “Behold, I will hasten my work in its time.” (D&C 88:73)

The Lord’s work is certainly hastening with the building of temples throughout the world, but our work as women is hastening as well. We are running at a fever pitch from daylight to midnight with no finish line in sight. We cannot promise a finish line nor a ribbon for completing the race, but if you read on, we will share our journey to find balance in our lives as we have prepared this sharing station for you:

After reading half a dozen books and dozens of inspiring talks, we found the greatest inspiration for finding balance came from reading and pondering the scriptures.

Following the example of The Master Teacher, we use a tree as our teaching tool. One side of the tree is an overgrown bramble of showy branches, but with small fruit. The other side is well pruned with large fruit. We use symbols such as examining our motives for life’s choices; the need to prune the branches (simplify) and thin the fruit (prioritize). But the most important element in finding balance in our lives came when we considered nourishing the roots--the vital part of the tree that doesn’t show.

Examine Motives

Delving into our motives for doing what we do is akin to open heart surgery or maybe better said “open soul searching.” It requires taking a good hard look in the mirror and acknowledging the wrinkles. We have to acknowledge who is dictating our motives for being so busy.

Christ said “...beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.” (Matt. 16:11) And maybe in today’s jargon he might have cautioned us to beware if our “needs” are being leavened by the “Jones” or by the advertising media.

Bishop R. Scott Strong, at the Draper, Utah, Willow Creek 2nd Ward Conference, May 17, 1998, compared the busyness of life to the overgrown branches in Jacob’s allegory of the Olive Tree in the Book of Mormon: Jacob 5:48 “...have not the branches thereof overcome the roots which are good? And because the branches have overcome the roots thereof, behold they grew faster than the strength of the roots, taking strength unto themselves.”

He suggests that when we allow elective activities and pursuits of this world, “as benign or laudable as they may be,” to overcome fundamental marital and family togetherness and true spiritual nurturing, our family trees will suffer.

He cautions that “when too much of our focus, our energy, our time and means are going to the many branches of life instead of the spiritual roots, our efforts could actually be the antithesis of our eternal goals--an over abundance and preoccupation with things and activities can rob us of the very spiritual vitality, peace and joy we are seeking to achieve in our lives and families.”

When we are tempted by the numberless activities for ourselves and our children that sap our strength and leave us bewildered, we should also consider the three temptations Satan used (Matt. 4:1-10) to distract Christ and try to get him to question His divinity--which are a pattern for all temptations that try to distract us from understanding our divine natures as well:

(1) a temptation of the appetite

(2) a yielding to the pride and fashion and vanity of those alienated from the things of God, and

(3) a gratifying of the passion, or a desire for the riches of the world, or power among men. (David O. McKay in CR, Oct. 1911, p. 59)

Jesus' wise and exemplary reply to these temptations was “Get thee hence, Satan...” The key to Christ's response is that he knew who he was. We, too, must keep at the forefront of our mind exactly who we are and examine our motives in the bright light of our own divine potential.

Prune & Prioritize

When we begin to know who we are--the kind of tree we are to become at maturity--we begin to get a sense of how to prune and shape our life's tree. Cutting off the excess branches leaves a tree looking frighteningly bare, and may even be a bit painful, but if our tree doesn't get pruned, it will become overgrown with branches and not produce the kind nor the quality of fruit we so desire. Let's begin by pruning away some obvious time and energy wasters:

- *Cut out daytime TV (unless you are also ironing or doing something productive)
- *Limit telephone calls to three minutes (that's when gossip usually starts)
- *Avoid negative people (they sap your strength)
- *Avoid major “spring cleaning” by cleaning one dirty spot each day (under a bed, a drawer, a closet)
- *Delegate household chores (balance what you do for your children with what you require them to do for themselves)
- *Forgive offenses and hurts immediately (holding grudges drags you down)
- *Be the first to say “I'm sorry” (even if you're not the one at fault)

Every day the mailman brings at least one request for a donation of money--and often two or three. When our tax accountant complained about our long list of \$10 and \$25 donations, we decided to prune our list of charities and make a few meaningful donations instead of many small ones. Our time, like our money, is precious and cannot be spread too thin. We must seriously evaluate how many charities (or volunteer efforts) we support with our time and energy.

Our day of overwhelming prosperity, rapid communication and immediate gratification absolutely requires pruning and simplifying. “We need to cut back on every side and, in some cases, perform major surgery,” Bishop Strong warns. He further challenges us to “...let go of so much that this world is offering.”

Eliminating activities we enjoy can be very painful--much like thinning the fruit as it begins to mature when the tender branches are overloaded.

Steven R. Covey, et al, in the book *First Things First* tells the story of a man teaching a time-management seminar who took a wide-mouth gallon jar from under the counter, filled it with fist-size rocks and asked the participants if it was full. Some said yes, some said no. He then poured in a bucket of pea gravel, followed by sand and then water, each time asking if the jar was full. Finally he asked “What is the lesson in this visual aid?” Somebody in the back raised his hand and said, “No matter how busy your life is, there is always room for more?”

“No,” the teacher said as the class broke into laughter. “That’s not it!”

“The lesson is...if you don’t put the big rocks in first you’ll never get them in later.”

(New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994, p 88-9)

When Christ gently chastised Martha for being “careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful:” (Luke 10:40-42) He did not mean she was never to prepare food nor make her guests comfortable, He only suggested that right now, “while I am here, one thing is needful”--that she should sit at His feet and listen to Him. He wanted her presence more than her careful preparations and service. Could that mean toast and canned peaches served to our guests gathered around us in love and peace might be better than a gourmet meal we have worked ourselves up into a short-tempered tissy to prepare?

If an important part of our mission is to make our homes sanctuaries of peace, we can learn much from Christ’s parable of heaven found in the 13th chapter of Matthew:
44) He likened the kingdom of heaven to a treasure hid in a field; the which when a man found it he selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field.

45) “And again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls:

46) Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it.

47) And again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, what was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind:

48) Which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away.”

Nourish the roots - our roots - our souls

No amount of pruning and thinning can compensate for a root system that is not regularly and sufficiently nourished. Christ said: “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy

laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls.” (Matt 11:28-29)

What a great promise! Just what we need, rest and nourishment to our souls. But the truth is, sometimes we don't think we have time to do one more thing! Where would it fit into the busy day? Again, looking to Christ as our example, he went out “early in the morning” to commune with God.

Communing with God in the morning helps us find balance for the entire day. If we get up just a half an hour early and kneel before him in the stillness of the morning--telling Him of our concerns and challenges, then turn to His word in the scriptures for even 15 or 20 minutes, He will nourish our souls and help us make wise choices of how to most effectively use our day; thus we will have less stress and be less tired. We have his promise IF we humbly seek Him.

“Acquaint now thyself with him and be at peace.” Job 22:21

“Thou wilt shew me the path of life; in thy presence is fulness of joy.” Psalms 16:11

“...feast upon the words of Christ; for behold, the words of Christ will tell you all things what ye should do.” 2 Nephi 32:3

Find those scriptures that speak to you and nourish your soul, remembering that our souls, like our trees, must be nourished faithfully and regularly. Maybe morning is not the time for your daily nourishment, but to be successful in finding the essential nourishment for our souls we must have a plan.

When President Hinckley asked us to read the Book of Mormon last year, he gave us a plan to accomplish the goal. “If you will read a bit more than one and one-half chapters a day, you will be able to finish the book before the end of this year.” He encouraged us to read the Book of Mormon to lift us above the things of the world. He promised, “Without reservation... if each of you will observe this simple program, regardless of how many times you previously may have read the Book of Mormon, there will come into your lives and into your homes an added measure of the Spirit of the Lord, a strengthening resolution to walk in obedience to His commandments, and a stronger testimony of the living reality of the Son of God.”

It was a great plan, and it worked for us and thousands of others. This year our plan has been to begin our days with prayer and pondering the scriptures--not setting goals to read a certain number of pages each day, but to spend time with the Lord. We have focused on passages that speak to and nourish our souls, beginning with the words of the Master found in Third Nephi in the Book of Mormon and in the Gospels of the New Testament.

We have not found perfect balance, but we have come to understand that balance comes when we heed the right voices to guide our busy lives. The war of worlds is real. The God of this world shouts his voice through a myriad of media to DO more, HAVE more, BUY more, TRY more. The still small voice of The God of Heaven and Earth whispers such counsel as “my soul delighteth in plainness,” “Be still and know that I am God,” and “Come unto me and I will give you rest.”

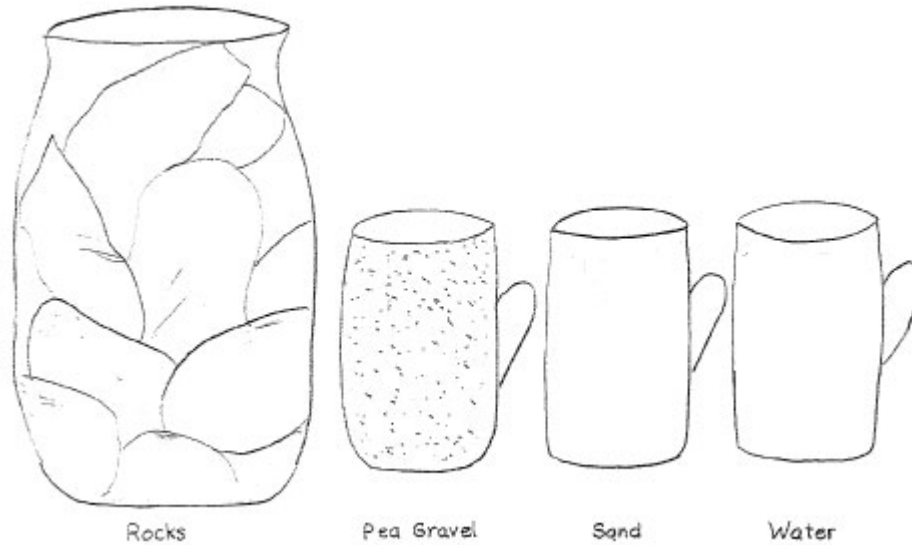
Examine Motives for Busyness (Handout #2)



“And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful. And these are they which are sown on good ground; such as hear the word, and receive it, and bring forth fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some an hundred.”

St. Mark 4:19-20

Prune & Prioritize (Handout #3)



Steven R. Covey, et al, in the book *First Things First* tells the story of a man teaching a time-management seminar who took a wide-mouth gallon jar from under the counter, filled it with fist-size rocks and asked the participants if it was full. Some said yes, some said no. He then poured in a bucket of pea gravel, followed by sand and then water, each time asking if the jar was full. Finally he asked “What is the lesson in this visual aid?” Somebody in the back raised his hand and said, “No matter how busy your life is, there is always room for more?”

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What a powerful picture. We must choose the important big rocks and put them into our lives first and if there is time and space the less important things will naturally fit in. Christ said “Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all else will be added...” (Mat. 6:33) ALL ELSE, he said. It seems as though our Master Teacher is telling us what our big rocks should be.

Nourish the Roots - Our Roots - Our Souls
(Handout #4)



“No matter if a tree grows to more than a thousand feet in height, each leaf, each day must return to its’ roots for nourishment.”

Author unknown

Jesus said--

“I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.”

St. John 15:5