



President Gordon B. Hinckley

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Four Imperatives for Religious Educators

President Gordon B. Hinckley

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It is a pleasure to be with you. I appreciate the kind words which have been said.

It was almost foolish of me to try to be here tonight. I was scolded by the stewardess for trying to get off the plane before it stopped. I have had a long and crowded day. I arose early this morning and dictated these notes. I then hurried to the temple to perform a marriage, rushed to the barber to get my hair clipped, hurried to the airport to fly to Seattle, attended two meetings there, then rushed to the airport, flew back, and I am here. It is too much to put that much into one day, and it is symptomatic of the jostling, busy times in which we live.

You are familiar with this tempo because it is of the nature of your lives also. Your days are filled with the duties of teaching, and your nights are crowded with meetings such as this and many others incident to the responsibilities you carry as active and able members of the Church.

I wish it were not necessary to stand here at a pulpit and speak to a congregation. I wish, rather, that we could sit down together in small groups and talk quietly of problems and hopes and dreams. But that is not feasible, and so I come to these circumstances not to lecture but simply to talk with you insofar as the circumstances will permit. I earnestly pray for the direction of the Holy Spirit, for I desire only one thing, and that is to say something that will be helpful.

I was tempted to talk about your students and the responsibility you have toward them. But before undertaking this task, I read the talks given on past occasions by Elder Boyd K. Packer, President Ezra Taft Benson, and President Spencer W. Kimball. If you will read them again, you will have what you need on these matters and stated better than I would have done. And so I think I would like to talk rather informally about you, as men and women, as husbands and wives, as teachers and administrators, as those among us who, with talents large and small, have been given great responsibility and of whom so much is expected.

First, I wish to congratulate you on the tremendously effective work you are doing. I have now lived long enough to observe three generations of youth in the Church. There can be no doubt that those who have come under your direction are far better educated in the history, the doctrine, and the practices of the Church than any other generation in our history. We are making great progress. It is not always apparent to those involved in the day-to-day programs. But when one stands back and looks across fifty or sixty years, it is obvious and it is gratifying. I have no doubt that the seminary and institute of religion program has had more to do with this than has any other single factor. I commend you warmly for what you have done, and with that commendation I wish to thank you. I know that it has taken great faith and prayers and tremendous effort, but I know also that you must derive sweet satisfaction as you witness those who have been under your tutelage flower into effective missionaries and then go on to become faithful and active members of the Church and strong and able citizens who carry responsibilities of leadership in many parts of the earth.

1. Keep on Growing

And now I should like to speak briefly of four imperatives, if I may call them that. The first, *keep on growing*. You are all educated people—highly educated. You who are here tonight are graduates of many universities, with bachelor's, master's, and doctor's degrees. One of the great dangers of higher education is what I call "academic burnout." The earning of a degree is such a grind that once it is earned there is a disposition to say, "I have made it, and now I'll coast for a season." The season sometimes becomes a lifetime. I should like to pass on to you these words written by Dr. Joshua Loth Liebman: "The great thing is that as long as we live, we have the privilege of growing. We can learn new skills, engage in new kinds of work, devote ourselves to new causes, make new friends. Accepting, then, the truth that we are capable in some directions and limited in others, that genius is rare, that mediocrity is the portion of most of us, let us remember that we

can and must change ourselves. Until the day of our death we can and must change ourselves. Until the day of our death we can grow, we can tap hidden resources in our makeup.”¹

None of us, my brethren and sisters, knows enough. The learning process is an endless process. We must read, we must observe, we must assimilate, and we must ponder that to which we expose our minds. I believe in evolution, not organic evolution, as it is called, but in the evolution of the mind, the heart, and the soul of man. I believe in improvement. I believe in growth. I commend to you these marvelous words given by the Lord through revelation to the Prophet Joseph Smith: “That which is of God is light; and he that receiveth light, and continueth in God, receiveth more light; and that light groweth brighter and brighter until the perfect day” (D&C 50:24).

I think this is one of the great and stimulating and promising statements in all of our scripture. It sets forth the pathway to perfection through a process of increase of light and understanding of eternal truths. You cannot afford to stop. You must not rest in your development. You are teaching a generation of youth who are hungry for knowledge and even more hungry for inspiration. You, my beloved associates, need to be constantly drinking of the waters of knowledge and revelation. There is so much to learn and so little time in which to learn it. I confess I am constantly appalled by the scarcity of my knowledge, and the one resentment I think I carry concerns the many pressing demands which limit the opportunity for reading. As we talk of reading, I should like to add a word concerning that which we absorb not only out of the processes of the mind, but something further which comes by the power of the Spirit. Remember this promise given by revelation: “God shall give unto you knowledge by his Holy Spirit, yea, by the unspeakable gift of the Holy Ghost” (D&C 121:26).

Keep on growing, my brothers and sisters, whether you are thirty or whether you are seventy. Your industry in so doing will cause the years to pass faster than you might wish, but they will be filled with a sweet and wonderful zest that will add flavor to your life and power to your teaching. And to all of this you may add the promise that “whatever principle of intelligence we attain unto in this life, it will rise with us in the resurrection” (D&C 130:18).

2. Grow with Balance

My second imperative is *grow with balance*. An old cliché states that modern education leads a man to know more and more about less and less. I want to plead with you to keep balance in your lives. Do not become obsessed with what may be called “a gospel hobby.” A good

meal always includes more than one course. You ought to have great strength in your chosen and assigned field of expertise. But I warn you against making that your only interest. I glory in the breadth of this commandment to the people of the Church:

And I give unto you a commandment that you shall teach one another the doctrine of the kingdom.

Teach ye diligently and my grace shall attend you, that you may be instructed more perfectly in theory, in principle, in doctrine, in the law of the gospel, in all things that pertain unto the kingdom of God, that are expedient for you to understand;

Of things both in heaven and in the earth, and under the earth; things which have been, things which are, things which must shortly come to pass; things which are at home, things which are abroad; the wars and the perplexities of the nations, and the judgments which are on the land; and a knowledge also of countries and of kingdoms—

That ye may be prepared in all things. (D&C 88:77–80)

In my life I have had opportunity to serve in many different capacities in the Church. Every time I was released in connection with a new calling, I felt reluctant to leave the old. But every call brought with it an opportunity to learn of another segment of the great program of the Church. I carry in my heart something of pity for those who permit themselves to get locked into one situation and never have an opportunity to experience any other. Missionaries not infrequently plead with their presidents that they be able to extend their missions. This is commendable and is usually indicative of the fact that they have been effective in their work. But a missionary's release usually is as providential as his call, as thereby there is opened to him other opportunities. And out of it all will come a balance in his life.

And beyond the Church there are other experiences to be had in other fields. There is so much work to be done in the communities in which we live. We are urged as citizens to make our contributions through participation in the processes of government. If we are to preserve in our communities those qualities which we so greatly cherish, we must become involved and expend time and effort in that labor. We can develop strength and gain much of experience in so doing while assisting with the pressing social problems that confront our society. We also need to know something about the world of business and science and mechanics in which we live.

It is imperative that we as teachers in the seminary and institute of religion program of the Church read constantly the scriptures and other books related directly to the history, the doctrine, and the practices

of the Church. But we ought also to be reading secular history, the great literature that has survived the ages, and the writings of contemporary thinkers and doers. In so doing we will find inspiration to pass on to our students who will need all the balanced strength they can get as they face the world into which they move.

Brethren and sisters, grow in the knowledge of the eternal truths which you are called to teach, and grow in understanding of the great and good men and women who have walked the earth and of the marvelous phenomena with which we are surrounded in the world in which we live. Now and then as I have watched a man become obsessed with a narrow segment of knowledge, I have worried about him. I have seen a few such. They have pursued relentlessly only a sliver of knowledge until they have lost a sense of balance. At the moment I think of two who went so far and became so misguided in their narrow pursuits that they who once had been effective teachers of youth have been found to be in apostasy and have been excommunicated from the Church. Keep balance in your lives. Beware of obsession. Beware of narrowness. Let your interests range over many good fields while working with growing strength in the field of your own profession.

3. Let Love Be Your Lodestar

Third, *let love be your lodestar*. It is the greatest force on earth. Love is a word of many meanings, and all of these apply to you. Cultivate love for the subjects you teach. There is a central figure in all of these, and that figure is the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God. Teach of Him. Bear testimony of Him out of a deep and earnest conviction so that your students will feel the strength of your testimony. Let me read a few words from a letter I received from a missionary who had been in the mission field less than three months:

I arrived in the mission field, and my love for my family, girlfriend, and home caused me great homesickness, and my feeling of homesickness brought me within inches of returning home. My mission president, with unbelievable love, held me here long enough to have me attend a very special missionary meeting with [one of the General Authorities] who was visiting our mission. He took us through an exercise with the scriptures in which we came to know our Redeemer, Jesus Christ. At the end of the meeting, we all stood and sang “I Am a Child of God” and then “I Know That My Redeemer Lives.” As the second song began, I found myself unable to sing. At that time I had the most spiritual experience of my life thus far. Through the entire song I just stood there, visualizing the Savior in my mind, and tears streamed down my face. At that very time I came to the unshakable knowledge that Jesus is the Christ and that He atoned for my sins.

I think such an experience is the privilege and opportunity and responsibility of every young man and woman in this Church. It is conviction of this kind that expressed itself in a great and powerful love that has been the root of the success of our missionary work, as everyone who has been in that work could testify. It has been said that more true love for the Lord has been *caught* than has been *taught*.

I recall hearing in England in a stake conference the testimony of an extremely able young man who had recently joined the Church. He said, "I was trained as a chartered accountant, trained to look for flaws in all that I examined. Because of my critical nature and training, the missionary lessons turned me off. But a good man who was a member, a man of limited education but great faith, talked quietly with me about what the gospel meant to him. He spoke out of a great spirit of love. And somehow that touched my heart, and I am here tonight speaking to you because of it."

I hope that you will cultivate in your hearts not only a love for the Savior of whom you bear testimony, but also a deep love for those you teach and particularly for those who appear to be so difficult to reach. They need you most, and the miracle that will come into their lives as you labor with them in a spirit of encouragement and kindness will bring gladness and satisfaction to you all of your days and strength and faith and testimony to them. Never forget the statement of the Lord concerning the sinner who repented. Read frequently that marvelously beautiful and touching parable of the prodigal son that is set forth in the fifteenth chapter of Luke.

Further, cultivate a spirit of love for your family. We all say we have it. Maybe we do. Hopefully we do. But I should like to remind you that it constantly needs refreshing. Husbands, look for the beauty in your wives. Wives, uphold and sustain and cherish your husbands; and parents, love your children with a great and evident affection. Unless there is love in the home, the work in the classroom will become only an exercise.

4. Enjoy Your Work

And now, finally, *enjoy your work*. Be happy. I meet so many people who constantly complain about the burden of their responsibilities. Of course the pressures are great. There is much, too much, to do. There are financial burdens to add to all of these pressures, and with all of this are prone to complain, frequently at home, often in public. Turn your thinking around. The gospel is good news. Man is that he might have joy. Be happy! Let that happiness shine through your faces and speak through your testimonies. You can expect problems. There may

be occasional tragedies. But shining through all of this is the plea of the Lord: “Come unto me, all ye that labour 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. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:28–30).

I enjoy these words of Jenkin Lloyd Jones, which I clipped from a column in the *Deseret News* some years ago. I pass them on to you as I conclude my remarks. Said he:

Anyone who imagines that bliss is normal is going to waste a lot of time running around shouting that he’s been robbed.

Most putts don’t drop. Most beef is tough. Most children grow up to be just people. Most successful marriages require a high degree of mutual toleration. Most jobs are more often dull than otherwise.

Life is like an old-time rail journey—delays, sidetracks, smoke, dust, cinders, and jolts, interspersed only occasionally by beautiful vistas and thrilling bursts of speed. The trick is to thank the Lord for letting you have the ride.²

I repeat, my brothers and sisters, the trick is to thank the Lord for letting you have the ride; and really, isn’t it a wonderful ride? Enjoy it! Laugh about it! Sing about it! Remember the words of the writer of Proverbs:

“A merry heart doeth good like a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones” (Proverbs 17:22).

God bless you, my beloved associates, in this great and sacred work. May you grow in strength and power and capacity and understanding with each passing day. May you cultivate constantly a saving balance in your life. May you speak from hearts filled with love for the Lord, for His children, for your own dear ones. And may there be gladness in your hearts as you reflect on the marvelous kindness of the Lord to you and upon your great and sacred opportunity to touch for everlasting good those who daily come under your direction.

God bless each of you that there may be love and peace in your homes, and in your hearts that satisfaction which comes of work well done in so great a cause, I humbly pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen. **RE**

Notes

1. Joshua Loth Liebman, in “Peace of Mind,” in *Getting the Most Out of Life* (Pleasantville, NY: Reader’s Digest, 1948), 120.

2. Jenkin Lloyd Jones, *Deseret News*, June 12, 1973.