

Welfare Principles in the Home

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One of the highlights of my assignment at Church headquarters is working with other Church leaders on a multitude of issues that affect people living on every continent in this wonderful but often troubled planet of ours. We see the delicious fruits of man's great humanity to man. Unfortunately on occasion we are exposed to man's inhumanity that brings much sadness and even despair. Too often, it seems, mother nature reminds us of her awesome destructive power. In each situation, we endeavor to apply welfare principles and assist in the Lord's own way.

We reach out to the community of Saints as well as to those not of our faith. For Saints we use the label "welfare." For others, we identify aid as "humanitarian service." Regardless of the brand or label, the result is the same—assisting our Father in Heaven's children who are in - need.

Most of the responsibility for ministering to the welfare needs of Church members falls upon the broad shoulders of devoted bishops and Relief Society presidents. Sister Bonnie D. Parkin and I, along with our fellow committee members, see that Church storehouses are full and that other resources are available for bishops and Relief Society presidents to use in fulfilling

their scriptural mandate of seeking out and providing for the poor.

The overwhelming generosity of Latter-day Saints around the world as well as our storehouse system uniquely position us to render humanitarian assistance around the world. We have learned that people want to help in times of crisis. Our phones literally ring off the hook when people hear about a disaster. “What can we do to help?” is always the question.

In October 1998, Hurricane Mitch hovered over Honduras for several days. More than forty inches of rain fell in some locations in a four-day period. Mud slides and flooding covered everything with a thick, rust-colored mud. More than 13,000 members of the Church were forced out of their homes, along with hundreds of thousands of their neighbors. Roads were impassable. Food and hygiene items were in critically short supply. Honduras urgently needed the Church’s help. A sister from Ogden, Utah, phoned and said: “I have a son in the Honduras Tegucigalpa Mission. I want to help. What do you need the most? Let me get it for you.” We responded, “Sister, thank you for your offer, but what we need worse than anything right now is an airplane.” “Oh,” she said immediately, “I can take care of that!”

And she did! Within a few hours she called back, having arranged for a giant U.S. military C-5 cargo airplane. Her husband, a recently retired Air Force colonel, was engaged in a new business with a retired two-star general who had been in charge of the Southern Command in Panama during the last part of his career. Those two good men were able to connect with the Joint Chiefs of Staff and secure the commitment to have the large plane made available to us at nearby Hill Air Force Base at no cost. The final hurdle to jump was to secure concurrence for the use of that aircraft for humanitarian purposes from the State Department in Washington, D.C. My phone call to Senator Orrin Hatch brought a quick, positive solution. We owe so much to so many.

There must be a lesson in this story. Could it be that if you need what seems to be impossible, just ask a woman? Or could it be that there is nothing impossible to a woman determined to succeed? Or perhaps the lesson to be learned is that great spiritual power comes from acting in behalf of those in need.

Contributions faithfully continue week after week. At this moment, the Church as an institution is assisting the needy in Iraq, Zimbabwe, and Ethiopia, to name just a few active - projects.

I’m going to use the term *welfare* to include all that is done to reach out to bless lives,

regardless of how it is administered in the Church. One of the founding fathers of our present welfare plan, President J. Reuben Clark Jr., remarked sixty-seven years ago that “the real long-term objective of the Welfare Plan is the building of character in the members of the Church, givers and receivers, rescuing all that is finest down deep inside of them, and bringing to flower and fruitage the latent richness of the spirit, which after all is the mission and purpose and reason for being of this Church.”¹ His insightful statement remains one of the foundational elements of our mission to provide in the Lord’s way.

President Marion G. Romney stated: “There is an interdependence between those who have and those who have not. The process of giving exalts the poor and humbles the rich. In the process, both are sanctified.”² The idea that giving both exalts and humbles and thus brings us together is of great spiritual significance.

“The touchstone of compassion is a measure of our discipleship; it is a measure of our love for God and for one another,” said President Howard W. Hunter.³ From the lips of one of my heroes, President Spencer W. Kimball, comes this thought-provoking statement: “Isn’t the plan beautiful? Don’t you thrill to this part of the gospel that causes Zion to put on her beautiful garments? When viewed in this light, we can see that [welfare] is not a program, but the essence of the gospel. *It is the gospel in action.* It is the crowning principle of a Christian life.”⁴

Let me summarize these powerful prophetic statements. Welfare is a means of rescuing all that is finest in givers and receivers. It is a means of exalting the poor and humbling the rich and a measure of our discipleship. It is the very essence of the gospel and the crowning principle of a Christian life. Though it may be simple, perhaps even obvious to most, may I suggest the following: *Faithfully living and practicing sacred welfare principles in the home brings great spiritual strength to families and individual family members.*

I have observed over the years that spiritually strong individuals and families share common characteristics. Among their virtues, they know and study the gospel; they follow the advice of the prophets; they are obedient to their covenants; they love and respect each other; they make prayer an integral part of life; and they display a great love of our Father in Heaven. In addition to all of that, they live and practice welfare principles in their homes.

Picture in your mind this scene described in the Church-produced pamphlet *Family First*: A father leaves the homestead on a tractor, his young son sitting behind him, with the early morning sun rising above the nearby mountains. The father begins to plow his field near a canal

bank while his son plays there. Suddenly the father hears desperate calls for help and looks up from his plowing to see his son hanging onto a slippery, thin willow growing on the canal bank. “‘Hang on, son,’ the father reassures. ‘Hang on till I plow just one more round.’ Unbelievable? Absolutely. What parent would leave a child struggling against a swift-running stream of water, fighting for his very life? And yet as [our] children grow, many times they are struggling against a swift-running stream, currents in a world that threaten their sense of values and self-worth. How do [we] as parents give them the message, ‘Hang on, I’ll be right there.’?”⁵

I believe we can best deliver the message within the *home and family*. I also believe that *example* is by far the most effective delivery device. By living and teaching welfare principles in the home, we can both materially and spiritually strengthen our families, particularly our children, against the many challenges they face each day. Over a lifetime, welfare can truly become the crowning principle of an individual’s Christian life, the living essence of the gospel, particularly if it is deeply rooted in the nourishing fiber of *home, family, and example*. Because of a special endowment of charity, love, and great sensitivity, women are uniquely qualified to lead out in practicing welfare principles in the home.⁶

Have you ever thought about welfare as it relates to the law of the fast? The law of the fast may be as old as the human family. In Old Testament times, prophets repeatedly expressed themselves about the commandment to observe the law of fasting and prayer. Most often prayer is mentioned in the scriptures as a companion to fasting. I know it is sometimes difficult to convince children, particularly teenagers, that there is value in obeying the law of the fast. On far more than one occasion, we have heard the moans and groans of children as they were reminded that it was fast day. Our youngest son, in particular, was always disgruntled to wake up on Sunday morning and be reminded—just as he was reaching for that cereal box in the cupboard—that it was fast day. Several years later, we received a letter from him in the mission field. “Mom and Dad, I have a testimony of fasting! One of our investigators was really wavering in his commitment to be baptized. . . . We fasted and prayed for him, and he is back on track! Fasting *really works!*”⁷

Our son had not yet experienced a strong personal desire to rely heavily on the Spirit for help, but his desire for the investigator to accept the gospel brought him a personal test of this principle. This is the same son who, at four years old, came home from sacrament meeting on the Sunday I was called to be bishop of our ward and asked his mother, “Is dad now the person that

gets all the envelopes with money in them?” Barbara replied that, yes, the bishop receives the envelopes *for* our Father in Heaven. Our son then let out a loud squeal and exclaimed, “Oh, goody, we’re gonna be rich!” We knew we had our work cut out for us way back then.

The Savior proclaimed that the greatest of all the commandments centered on loving our Father in Heaven and fellowmen (see Matthew 22:36–40). “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these,” the Savior reminds us, “ye have done it unto me” (Matthew 25:40; see also D&C 42:38). One way we show our love to Him is through observance of the law of the fast. President David O. McKay explained, “We have in the church one of the best systems in the world of aiding one another—the fast offerings.”⁸ He further indicated that “if there were no other virtue in fasting but gaining strength of character, that alone would be sufficient justification for its universal acceptance.”⁹ Fifty-nine years later in a general priesthood meeting President Gordon B. Hinckley counseled: “Think, my brethren, of what would happen if the principles of fast day and the fast offering were observed throughout the world. The hungry would be fed, the naked clothed, the homeless sheltered. Our burden of taxes would be lightened. The giver would not suffer but would be blessed by his small abstinence. A new measure of concern and unselfishness would grow in the hearts of people everywhere.”¹⁰

Our children need to see us respond to the deacons as they make their monthly rounds or see us include our fast offerings as we submit our tithing. They need to be a part of calculating what the family amount should be. Of course, when Mom and Dad feel they can be more generous than the value of two meals, they may wish their contribution to be a little more confidential. When discussing fast offerings, I always reflect on the well-chronicled statement of President Spencer W. Kimball: “Sometimes we have been a bit penurious and figured that we had for breakfast one egg and that cost so many cents and then we give that to the Lord. I think that when we are affluent, . . . that we ought to be very, very generous . . . and give, instead of the amount we saved by our two meals of fasting, perhaps much, much more—ten times more where we are in a position to do it.”¹¹

Living the law of the fast in the home brings not only increased spiritual strength to family members but also inner peace, and it helps hearts turn to the Lord and to other family members. A deep sense of gratitude is generated for the family’s blessings as well as an increased sensitivity to the needs of others. As families prayerfully fast for specific purposes and see the promised blessings of the Lord come forth, they grow more united in purpose.

Is it easy to teach the law of the fast in the home? Of course not. Does it take patience, determination, and discipline? Sure. Is it worth it? Absolutely! As families live the law of the fast in their homes, they are blessed in many ways.

The law of the fast is one important arrow in the quiver of living welfare principles in the home. Another is reaching out to assist extended family members, neighbors, and friends. Children who take part can learn firsthand the meaning of kindness and compassion as they become aware of other people's circumstances. They can also learn to respect and appreciate the diversity of human lives. My wonderful mother practiced and taught the principles of welfare and charity as I was growing up. Losing her father during the Depression, when she was only fourteen, caused her to learn resourcefulness, charity, and sensitivity to the needs of others, particularly her four younger siblings. Over the ensuing years, she has continued to give to her family, her extended family, neighbors, and friends in a very quiet way, always concerned for the well-being of others before her own. Now, in her ninetieth year, she continues to reach out by regularly making and sending handmade blankets to the Primary Children's Medical Center in Salt Lake City. Over the last several years, she has sent along with her love more than 200 blankets. I'm certain I have violated her comfort zone by giving away this secret—I'm due for a scolding!—but I'm so grateful for her magnificent example to her children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren.

Children can also learn marvelous lessons by helping to plan and execute a family preparedness plan. President Hinckley has repeated the family preparedness and self-reliance themes over and over again at recent general conferences. One important principle taught by participating and preparing is obedience—obedience to a prophet's voice.

When President Kimball suggested years ago that each family should have a vegetable garden and learn gardening techniques, our family decided to follow his direction. My grandfather invited us to use a small piece of land, and we launched our garden—or “farm,” as the children referred to it. Initial interest and enthusiasm were high. We had fun preparing the soil and planting the seeds. Then the real work of raising a garden set in. Our children discovered that constant cultivating, watering, and weeding was backbreaking work. Their interest waned until the fruits of the harvest were apparent. All of us boasted about the quality and taste of our corn, peas, and potatoes. Though we probably didn't save any money, we did gain much as a family that cannot be quantified. In fact, we invested in our family. Participating in family

preparedness and self-reliance not only teaches obedience and lifelong skills but also strengthens love and communication as families learn how to work together.

One challenge facing many families today is affluence. I can hear some of you say, “Please, dear Lord, give me that challenge.” But be careful what you wish. Too often our affluence, if not carefully managed, gets in the way of our long-term spiritual welfare. Living a provident lifestyle can be a blessing for generations to come. Living within or beneath our means brings peace of mind and reduces financial stress. Children learn self-discipline and, perhaps more important, gain an understanding of the critical difference between needs and wants. If our children do not understand the difference, their decisions as adults may severely impact their families. Mothers in the workforce to provide wants rather than needs when there are children in the home, or fathers working second and third jobs to acquire wants mistakenly perceived as needs, represent decisions that may hurt the family unit and the children. If we live providentially, our children will be more likely to make correct decisions when it comes to needs versus wants.

President Gordon B. Hinckley has said: “I feel to invite women everywhere to rise to the great potential within you. I do not ask that you reach beyond your capacity. I hope you will not nag yourselves with thoughts of failure. I hope you will not try to set goals far beyond your capacity to achieve. I hope you will simply do what you can do in the best way you know how. If you do so, you will witness miracles come to pass.”¹² May the Lord bless you as you play your vital and important role in helping to strengthen families and individuals by living sacred welfare principles in the home.

Notes

- 1.J. Reuben Clark, Jr., special meeting of stake presidents, 2 October 1936, quoted in *Providing in the Lord's Way: A Leader's Guide to Welfare* [welfare handbook] (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1990), i; also quoted by Marion G. Romney, “Living Welfare Principles,” *Ensign*, November 1981, 92.
- 2.Marion G. Romney, “The Celestial Nature of Self-Reliance,” *Ensign*, November 1982, 93.
- 3.Howard W. Hunter, “The Lord's Touchstone,” *Ensign*, November 1986, 35.
- 4.Spencer W. Kimball, “Welfare Services: The Gospel in Action,” *Ensign*, November 1977, 77; emphasis in original.
- 5.*Family First* [booklet] (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1992), 3.

6. I'm reminded of a story Elder Neal A. Maxwell tells about the persistent promptings he received from his wife. He tells of coming home after a long day's work to his wife's suggestion that he should go see Sister Pearl Lence. He acknowledged that he should go and said he would sometime soon, but that he was really very tired right now. Sister Maxwell persisted in gentle persuasion, and he finally went. When the door opened, Sister Lence greeted him, saying, "I have been praying all day you would come, Brother Maxwell, and the Spirit told me you would come." Elder Maxwell didn't elaborate on why he needed to be there but expressed gratitude for the sensitivity of a wife who was in tune with the Spirit at a time when perhaps he was not. (Neal A. Maxwell, "Women of Faith" [pamphlet] [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, n.d.]; also in *As Women of Faith: Talks Selected from the BYU Women's Conferences*, ed. Carol Cornwall Madsen and Mary E. Stovall [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989], 13.)
7. Letter in possession of author.
8. David O. McKay, quoted in Francis M. Gibbons, *Harold B. Lee: Man of Vision, Prophet of God* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1993), 127.
9. David O. McKay, Conference Report, April 1932, 65.
10. Gordon B. Hinckley, "The State of the Church," *Ensign*, May 1991, 52–53.
11. Spencer W. Kimball, Conference Report, April 1974, 184.
12. Gordon B. Hinckley, *Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997), 696.