

Insights on Church Leadership

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What If We Don't Have Some of These Qualities?

For those who think they you don't have all the qualities we have discussed in the previous chapters I would say: welcome to the club. Does that mean we don't qualify for service in the Church of Christ? Absolutely not. That just means that we are mortals and that we still have qualities or attributes to develop or to acquire, and that's one of the purposes of our earthly journey. The slow but continuous development of a heavenly character is one of the goals of our assignments in the Church.

How can we better understand the emotions our Father in Heaven experiences while carrying out the plan of salvation? Well, our leadership callings, especially in presidencies in any level (stake, ward or organizational) may give us a rough or imperfect idea, in a very small and finite scale. As little children, we felt love for almost everybody. Later, as we grew up, and as "... sin [conceived] in [our] hearts ...¹", prejudices, mistrust and other negative feelings grew inside us. When we experience--in a small and finite scale--what the Lord feels, our knowledge about Him increases, and so do our love and appreciation for Him and for our brothers and sisters.

I remember that when I was called to serve as a Bishop, I didn't even know all the members of my ward. I had arrived back in the ward just a few months before, after living for a number of years out of the state. How could I love people who I barely knew? The first time I addressed them as their Bishop, I told that although I had warm and good feelings towards all of them, I still couldn't say that I loved all of them, but I believed that I would soon have that feeling. A few months later, I was pleased to testify that I loved all of them.

What happened? We lived together, we prayed together, we had all sorts of joyful and sad experiences together. By and by, love started to blossom and it became part of our character.

"How do men obtain a knowledge of the glory of God, his perfections and attributes? By devoting themselves to his service, through prayer and supplication incessantly strengthening their faith in him, until, like Enoch, the brother of Jared, and Moses, they obtain a manifestation of God to themselves."²

¹ Moses 6:55; brackets added.

² Lectures on Faith, p.32

Being children of eternal and perfect beings, we are all born with the seeds of love, forgiveness, patience, charity, and all other divine virtues. As seeds, they need light (meaning the Spirit of the Lord) and nurturing (our acts of selfless service) in order to grow. President Spencer W. Kimball suggested the following to foster this growth:

"We must do more than ask the Lord for excellence. Perspiration must precede inspiration; there must be effort before there is excellence. We must do more than pray for these outcomes ... though we must surely pray. We must take thought. We must make effort. We must be patient. We must be professional. We must be spiritual ...³"

Some people may confuse this attitude of starting to serve others without the proper feelings with hypocrisy. Let me restate here that hypocrites are opportunists; they are not prone to serve others for the sake of doing good to others. Hypocrites are led by their own desires of gaining something: earthly praise, power, votes, favors, money, etc.

Those who strive to serve the Lord by serving their fellow beings need not fear of being considered hypocrites. First, because they are obeying the voice of the Lord, and secondly, because they will eventually develop the qualities they lack. This should not be confused with deceit. Once more: deceit occurs when someone emulate qualities to cheat or manipulate others, motivated solely by self-interest⁴.

The Prophet Joseph Smith received the following instruction from the Lord to William E. McLellin, in the early days of this dispensation: "Verily I say unto you, my servant William, that you are clean, but not all; repent, therefore, of those things which are not pleasing in my sight, saith the Lord, for the Lord will show them unto you."⁵ Even though Brother McLellin did not follow the counsel of the Lord until the end, we see from this verse that the Lord gave him an opportunity to amend his ways, and later in that same revelation the Lord promised that if he remained faithful to his teachings he would have eternal life.

We also have our shortcomings; some of us may be strong on paying tithing and struggle with the word of wisdom, or vice-versa; or we may struggle with inferiority (or superiority) complexes. But no matter what specific weakness we have, with the help of the Lord we can overcome all of them. These words from the Lord to Hyrum Smith may give us some hope: "Behold, thou hast a gift, or thou shalt have a gift if thou wilt desire of me in faith, with an honest heart, believing in the power of Jesus Christ ..."⁶ As we have discussed in an earlier chapter, and also based on the words of President Kimball, to "desire in faith" means more than simply asking for a blessing and then waiting for it to be sent to us from on high. We need to act. The qualities necessary to the ministry are acquired by stages, and we need to be both patient and persistent.

Two other important points to be remembered are: first, that this process of developing qualities is very personal; we should not judge ourselves using other mortal beings as a standard. Our standard has been and will ever be the Savior, the only perfect being that has ever lived on earth⁷. Secondly, that this

³ Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball, p.402. President Kimball taught this on October 10, 1975, while speaking to those who then served as faculty and staff at Brigham Young University.

⁴ See chapter 4 for a discussion on a few aspects of love unfeigned, and chapter 10 for a discussion on flattery.

⁵ D&C 66:3

⁶ D&C 11:10

⁷ See chapter 6 for a discussion on how imperfect beings like ourselves may achieve perfection while on this mortal stage of existence.

development never ends; and as soon as we cease to keep the commandments, no matter how much we have done in the past, we will fall. Let us consider these words from President Brigham Young:

"... a man might have visions, the angels of God might administer to him, he might have revelations, and see as many visions as you could count; he might have the heavens opened to him, and see the finger of the Lord, and all this would not make him the President of the Church, or an Elder, a High Priest, an Apostle; neither would it prove that he was even a Saint: something else is wanted to prove it. If you ask me what will prove a man or woman to be a Saint, I will answer the question. "If you love me," says Jesus, "you will keep my sayings." That is the touchstone. If you love the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Father, you will keep the commandments of the Son--you will do his will. If you neglect to do this, you may have all the visions and revelations that could be bestowed upon a mortal being, and yet be nothing but a devil. Why I use this expression is because when a man's mind is enlightened, and he turns from that light to darkness, it prepares him to be a devil. A man never knew how to be wicked, until light and truth were first made manifest to him. Then is the time for men to make their decision, and if they turn away from the Lord, it prepares them to become devils.⁸"

Therefore, our love towards our Heavenly Father and his son Jesus Christ is the driving force that can help us overcome our weaknesses and develop or acquire godly virtues. Let us always remember to do our best, to employ our greatest efforts, and to use the prayer of faith. If, after doing all this we, like the Apostle Paul, still find a "thorn in the flesh"⁹, let us not get discouraged: it is just an expedient employed by the Lord to teach us to rely on his grace¹⁰, and our best efforts will grant us the blessing of obtaining mercy in the judgment day.

⁸ JD, Vol I, p.133-134, April 6, 1853

⁹ 2 Corinthians 12:7

¹⁰ 2 Corinthians 12:9; 2 Nephi 4:17-20,26-29

About the Author



Marcus Helvécio Tourinho de Assis Martins is a native of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and joined The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in July, 1972. In August of 1978 he became the first black member to serve as a full-time missionary for the Church in the 20th century, serving in the Brazil São Paulo North Mission.

Since then, brother Martins served as bishop, counselor in branch presidencies, member of stake high councils, stake and ward executive secretary, high priests group leader, ward mission leader, temple officiator, stake and ward sunday school president, and teacher in primary, sunday school, and institute of religion. In the early 1980's he also translated the “Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ” into Portuguese.

Brother Martins has worked over the years as a systems analyst and independent consultant for the Brazilian government and a number of private corporations. He holds a Ph.D. in Sociology of Religion, Race and Ethnic Relations, a Master's degree in Organizational Behavior, and a bachelor's in Business Management. He taught religion and sociology classes at Brigham Young University, Ricks College, and currently serves as chair of the department of religious education at Brigham Young University-Hawaii.

He and Sister Mirian Barbosa Martins, herself a native of Petrópolis, Brazil, and a returned missionary with several years of leadership experience, have four children: Flávio, Natália, Felipe, and Cristina.