

SELF-RELIANCE

The principle of self-reliance is spiritual as well as temporal.

—Elder Boyd K. Packer

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*Elder Boyd K. Packer
Of the Quorum
of the Twelve Apostles
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Self-reliance . . . has application in emotional and in spiritual things.

I have become very anxious over the amount of counseling that we seem to need in the Church, and the network of counseling services that we keep building up without once emphasizing the principle of self-reliance as it is understood in the welfare program. There are too many in the Church who seem to be totally dependent, emotionally and spiritually, upon others. They subsist on some kind of emotional welfare. They are unwilling to sustain themselves. They become so dependent that they endlessly need to be shored up, lifted up, endlessly need encouragement, and they contribute little of their own.

I have been concerned that we may be on the verge of doing to ourselves emotionally (and therefore spiritually) what we have been working so hard for generations to avoid materially. If we lose our emotional and spiritual self-reliance, we can be weakened quite as much, perhaps even more, than when we become dependent materially. On one hand, we counsel bishops to avoid abuses in the Church welfare program. On the other hand, we seem to dole out counsel and advice without the slightest thought that the member should solve the problem himself or turn to his family. Only when those resources are inadequate should he turn to the Church.

We recognize at once that it would be folly to develop welfare production projects to totally sustain all of the members of the Church in every material need. We ought likewise to be very thoughtful before we develop a vast network of counseling programs with all of the bishops and branch presidents and everyone else, doling out counsel in an effort to totally sustain our members in every emotional need.

If we are not careful, we can lose the power of individual revelation. The Lord said to Oliver Cowdery, and it has meaning for all of us:

“Behold, you have not understood; you have supposed that I would give it unto you, when you took no thought save it was to ask me.

“But, behold, I say unto you, that you must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right, and if it is right I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you; therefore, you shall feel that it is right.

“But if it be not right you shall have no such feelings, but you shall have a stupor of thought that shall cause you to forget the thing which is wrong.”
(D&C 9:7–9) . . .

Guidelines for Emotional and Spiritual Independence

Now, if you are willing to agree that the basic principles underlying the Church welfare program have application in your emotional and spiritual life—specifically, that independence, industry, thrift, self-reliance, and self-respect should be developed; that work be enthroned as a ruling principle in your life; that the evils of an emotional or spiritual dole should be avoided; and that the aim of the Church is to help the members to help themselves—then I have some principles and some suggestions for you.

We mentioned earlier that there should not be the slightest embarrassment for any member of the Church to receive welfare assistance, provided he has exhausted his own personal resources first and those available in his family. Likewise, there should not be the slightest embarrassment on the part of any member of the Church who needs counsel to receive that counsel. At times it may be crucial that you seek and that you accept counsel.

When you are discouraged and feel that you cannot solve a problem on your own, you may be right, but at least you are obligated to try. Every personal resource available to you should be committed before

you take another step, and you have powerful resources. The Book of Mormon declares this one, which is often overlooked:

"For the Spirit is the same, yesterday, today, and forever. And the way is prepared from the fall of man, and salvation is free.

"And men are instructed sufficiently that they know good from evil." (2 Nephi 2:4–5; emphasis added)

It is critically important that you understand that you already know right from wrong, that you're innately, inherently, and intuitively good. When you say, "I can't! I can't solve my problems!" I want to thunder out, "Don't you realize who you are? Haven't you learned yet that you are a son or a daughter of Almighty God? Do you not know that there are powerful resources inherited from Him that you can call upon to give you steadiness and courage and great power?"

Most of you have been taught the gospel all your lives. All of you know the difference between good and evil, between right and wrong. Isn't it time then that you decide that you're going to do right? In so doing you're making a choice. Not just *a* choice, but you're making *the* choice. Once you've decided that, with no fingers crossed, no counterfeiting, no reservations or hesitancy, the rest will all fall into place.

Most people who come for counsel to the stake presidents, branch presidents, bishops, and others, and to us as General Authorities, don't come because they are confused and they are not able to see the difference between right and wrong. They come because they're tempted to do something that deep down they know is wrong, and they want that decision ratified.

When you have a problem, work it out in your own mind first. Ponder on it and analyze it and meditate on it. Pray about it. I've come to learn that major decisions can't be forced. You must look ahead and have vision. What was it the prophet said in the Old Testament? "Where there is no vision, the people perish" (Proverbs 29:18).

Ponder on things a little each day and don't always be in the crisis of making major decisions on the spur of the moment. If you're looking ahead in life, you can see major problems coming down the road toward you from some considerable distance. By the time you meet one another, you are able at the very beginning to take charge of the conversation. Once in a while a major decision will jump out at

you from the side of the road and startle the wits out of you, but not very often. If you've already decided that you're going to do what is right and let all of the consequences follow, even those encounters won't hurt you.

I have learned that the best time to wrestle with major problems is early in the morning. Your mind is then fresh and alert. The blackboard of your mind has been erased by a good night's rest. The accumulated distractions of the day are not in your way. Your body has been rested also. That's the time to think something through very carefully and to receive personal revelation.

I've heard President Harold B. Lee begin many a statement about matters involving revelation with an expression something like this: "In the early hours of the morning, while I was pondering upon that subject," and so on. He made it a practice to work on the problems that required revelation in the fresh, alert hours of the early morning.

The Lord knew something when He directed in the Doctrine and Covenants, "Cease to sleep longer than is needful; retire to thy bed early, that ye may not be weary; arise early, that your bodies and your minds may be invigorated" (D&C 88:124). . . .

I counsel our children to do their critical studying in the early hours of the morning when they're fresh and alert, rather than to fight physical weariness and mental exhaustion at night. I've learned that the dictum "Early to bed, early to rise" is powerful. When under pressure—for instance, when I was preparing this talk—you wouldn't find me burning the midnight oil. Much rather I'd be early to bed and getting up in the wee hours of the morning, when I could be close to Him who guides this work.

Now, about revelation. We have all been taught that revelation is available to each of us individually. The question I'm most often asked about revelation is, "How do I know when I have received it? I've prayed about it and fasted over this problem and prayed about it and prayed about it, and I still don't quite know what to do. How can I really tell whether I'm being inspired so I won't make a mistake?"

First, do you go to the Lord with a problem and ask Him to make your decision for you? Or do you work and meditate and pray and then make a decision yourself? Measure the problem against what you know to be right and wrong, and then make the decision. Then, ask Him if the decision is right or if

it is wrong. Remember what He said to Oliver Cowdery about working it out in your mind.

Listen to this sentence if you don't hear anything else: If we foolishly ask our bishop or branch president or the Lord to make a decision for us, there's precious little self-reliance in that. Think what it costs every time you have somebody else make a decision for you.

I think I should mention one other thing, and I hope this won't be misunderstood. We often find young people who will pray with great exertion over matters that they are free to decide for themselves. Suppose, if you will, that a couple had money available to build a house. Suppose they had prayed endlessly over whether they should build an Early American style, a ranch style, modern-style architecture, or perhaps a Mediterranean style. Has it ever occurred to you that perhaps the Lord just plain doesn't care? Let them build what they want to build. It's their choice. In many things we can do just what we want.

Now, there *are* some things he cares about very much. If you're going to build that house, then be honest and pay for the material that goes into it and do a decent job of building it. When you move into it, live righteously in it. Those are the things that count.

On occasions I've had to counsel people that the Lord would probably quite willingly approve the thing they intend to do even when they want to. It's strange when they come and almost feel guilty about doing something because they want to, even when it's righteous. The Lord is very generous with the freedom He gives us. The more we learn to follow the right, the more we are spiritually self-reliant, the more our freedom and our independence are affirmed. "If ye continue in my word," He said, "then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31–32). . . .

"How is it that ye do not keep the commandments of the Lord? How is it that ye will perish, because of the hardness of your hearts? Do ye not remember the things which the Lord hath said?—If ye will not harden your hearts, and ask me in faith, believing that ye shall receive, with diligence in keeping my commandments, surely these things shall be made known unto you" (see 1 Nephi 15:7–11).

In conclusion, if we lose the spirit and power of individual revelation, we have lost much in this Church. You have great and powerful resources. You, through prayer, can solve your problems without

endlessly going to those who are trying so hard to help others.

Now, if you start receiving revelations for anyone else's jurisdiction, you know immediately that you're out of order, that they come from the wrong source.

If you become so dependent and insecure that prayer and the answer to prayer are such that you are hesitant to rely on them, then you are weak.

If we follow a course where, on one hand, we would carefully scrutinize an order for welfare products and yet, on the other hand, dole out counsel and advice without sending you to your own storehouse of knowledge and inspiration, then we have done you a disservice.

This Church relies on individual testimony. Each must earn his own testimony. It is then that you can stand and say, as I can say, that I know that God lives, that He is our Father, that we have a child-parent relationship with Him. I know that He is close, that we can go to Him and appeal, and then, if we will be obedient and listen and use every resource, we will have an answer to our prayers.

This is His church. God lives. Jesus is the Christ. We have a prophet presiding over this Church. Every one of us and every other soul on this earth can know that. I bear witness of that. I know that He lives and affirm this witness to you in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

BECOMING SELF-RELIANT



*Elder L. Tom Perry
Of the Quorum
of the Twelve Apostles
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Nephi's Self-Reliance

Lehi and his family, after wandering in the wilderness for eight years, came to a land they called Bountiful because it was a place of much fruit and wild honey. They came to a great sea, and they rejoiced unto the Lord because He had preserved them. After they had been in the land Bountiful for a space of many days, the Lord spoke to Nephi and said, "Arise, and get thee into the mountain" (1 Nephi 17:7).

Nephi obeyed the Lord; he went into the mountain and prayed. And the Lord commanded Nephi, "Thou shalt construct a ship, after the manner which I shall show thee, that I may carry thy people across these waters" (1 Nephi 17:8).

Then Nephi asked the Lord, "Whither shall I go that I may find ore to molten, that I may make tools to construct the ship after the manner which thou hast shown unto me?" (1 Nephi 17:9).

The Lord instructed Nephi where he could find ore, but then Nephi was on his own. In 1 Nephi, chapter 17, we read:

"And it came to pass that I, Nephi, did make a bellows wherewith to blow the fire, of the skins of beasts; and after I had made a bellows, that I might have wherewith to blow the fire, I did smite two stones together that I might make fire. . . .

"And it came to pass that I did make tools of the ore which I did molten out of the rock" (17:11, 16).

This is one of the more interesting stories we have in the scriptures because it tells of an instance in which the Lord provided help but then stepped aside to allow one of His sons to exercise his own initiative. I have sometimes wondered what would have happened if Nephi had asked the Lord for tools instead of a place to find the ore to make the tools. I doubt the Lord would have honored Nephi's request. You see, the Lord knew that Nephi could make the tools, and it is seldom the Lord will do something for us that we can do for ourselves.

Importance of Self-Reliance

The Lord does help when we go to Him in times of need, especially when we are committed to His work and respond to His will. But the Lord only helps those who are willing to help themselves. He expects His children to be self-reliant to the degree they can be.

Brigham Young instructed the Saints, "Instead of searching after what the Lord is going to do for us, let us inquire what we can do for ourselves"

(*Discourses of Brigham Young*, sel. John A. Widtsoe [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1941], p. 293).

Independence and self-reliance are critical to our spiritual and temporal growth. Whenever we get into situations which threaten our self-reliance, we will find our freedoms

threatened as well. If we increase our dependence on anything or anyone except the Lord, we will find an immediate decrease in our freedom to act. As President Heber J. Grant declared, "Nothing destroys the individuality of a man, a woman, or a child as much as the failure to be self-reliant" ("Address," *Relief Society Magazine*, Oct. 1937, p. 627).

Never before in my life has the doctrine of self-reliance been more needed to be preached and encouraged for the benefit of the Saints. We live in a time of rapid change. Governments are rising and falling. Industries are blooming and then all too soon becoming obsolete. New discoveries in science are soon overshadowed by new findings. Unless we are continuously expanding our understanding and vision, we too will become out-of-date. Research tells us that individuals entering the labor market today will be forced to find three to five different career paths during their productive years.

What must we do to become more self-reliant?

A Family Tradition

My parents established a family tradition in our home which was fun for me in my early years and has become even more meaningful as I reflect back on it as the years have passed. On the first birthday of each child, the family would gather in the living room. In the center of the living room floor, our parents would place articles for the one-year-old child to select. The selection to be made might indicate an interest the child would pursue in life. The articles were the Bible, a child's bottle filled with milk, a toy, and a savings bank filled with coins. The child was placed on one side of the room and the family on the other side. Family members would encourage the child to crawl toward the objects and make a selection. This was all in fun, of course.

I was told that I selected the bank and went into finance as my profession. I watched my brother Ted select the scriptures, and he pursued law as his chosen profession. Over the years he has relied on the

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scriptures as a basis for his judgments. My youngest brother, Bob, was the well-rounded member of the family. He crawled over, sat down on the Bible, put the bottle of milk in his mouth, and then held the toy in one hand and the bank in the other.

Spiritual Nourishment

Now I propose to you that in this entertaining family activity we can find the most fundamental principles of self-reliance. First, the scriptures represent our need for spiritual nourishment. In the scriptures, the Lord reveals His will to His children. From the very beginning of time, He has instructed His prophets to record His communications with them for the benefit of His children. The holy scriptures declare eternal values; they are the firm foundation on which we can build a successful mortal experience. We become more self-reliant when we study the holy scriptures, which teach the principles that provide a divine center to our lives here in mortality.

We should be comforted by the fact that we have the best text which has ever been written or ever will be written as our guide. We can turn to 2 Kings, the fifth chapter, and learn about obedience. We can study the life of Job and learn integrity. King Benjamin's address in Mosiah teaches industry. The life of Joseph, as told in Genesis 39, tells us what we should do when our standard of morality is being tested.

These are just a few examples of the lessons we could learn from the holy scriptures. They are lessons which have stood the test of time. Our challenge is to make them come alive in the hearts and minds of our families as we assume the responsibility to teach them.

Temporal Self-Reliance

Second, the bottle filled with milk symbolizes the physical body's need for nourishment. Our welfare services program has taught us by using the spokes of a wheel to define the essential elements of temporal self-reliance. The elements contained in the wheel are education; physical health; employment; home storage; resource management; and social, emotional, and spiritual strength.

This summer my wife and I had the opportunity to visit an eighty-year-old man who certainly demonstrated each of these elements in his life. He was born in a small Idaho town and worked long hours on the farm to finance his education. He spent his professional life teaching English and Spanish in a small high school. To set aside funds for missions and the education of his large family, he grew strawberry and raspberry crops to be picked and sold to the local markets. This labor occupied his summers.

Because these fruits were so labor-intensive, few people had the ambition to grow them. They were much-wanted crops. The demand was always there for as many berries as he could produce. He was never satisfied with the productivity of his crops, so he studied new varieties in an attempt to find the best producers. His backyard was literally an experimental farm for testing the variety of bushes that produced the sweetest and most abundant fruit in his particular climate. His studies yielded increased productivity. The labor kept him in good physical health. The fields of berries furnished automatic employment for his children each summer. The berries delivered to the market could be exchanged not only for cash but also for commodities to be used in their home storage. He managed his resources to build a beautiful home and supply the needs of his family.

This man loved to watch the Lord's system of multiplying and replenishing the earth, which gave him social, emotional, and spiritual strength. Now retired from active teaching, he continues to grow his berries, not for profit but for satisfaction. Six mornings each week during the berry harvest season, you will see him leading a parade of ten to twelve cars out of the city toward his berry patch. Families come to add to their home storage by picking the berries. I asked him the price per case if we supplied our own labor. He answered: "I don't know. My pay is seeing the look on people's faces as they leave the field holding the fruits of their labors in their arms."

I am convinced there are thousands of ways for families to build self-reliance by working together in productive pursuits. Perhaps a good family home evening discussion could produce some ideas to help make your family unit more temporally self-reliant.

Proper Use of Resources

Third, the toy I mentioned earlier represents the acquisition of things of the world. We are bombarded today with powerful media to acquire now and pay later in what are purported to be painless monthly installments. We live in an impatient world where everyone wants everything now. The acquisition of worldly goods seems to foster an appetite for more rather than any kind of lasting satisfaction.

Using our resources and worldly goods wisely and extending their life will help us become more self-reliant. I watched a young family move this summer,

and I was intrigued by the labels on the boxes coming out of the storage room. They read, "Clothing—Girls—2 years old," "Clothing—Girls—3 years old," and so on up. Clearly, this family had a well-conceived plan to maximize the usage of purchased items of clothing.

We live in a world blessed with so much abundance. Let us be certain that the resources with which we are blessed are never wasted.

Financial Well-Being

Finally, the fourth item—the bank. It is a symbol of our financial well-being. I learned a great lesson early in my business career. My boss called me into his office. I could tell he had something on his mind. He said, "Give me a definition of interest." Of course, I reached back in my training and gave him a definition I had learned from a textbook. He said, "No, no, no, that's not the one I want. You listen and remember this one: Them that understands it, earns it; and them that don't, pays it."

Now it doesn't take a genius to understand that before you can collect interest, you must first have some savings. Having savings while continuing

to increase one's standard of living requires understanding of one simple practice and then religiously applying it. After paying your tithing of 10 percent to the Lord, you pay yourself a predetermined amount directly into savings. That leaves you a balance of your income to budget for taxes, food, clothing, shelter, transportation, etc. It is amazing to me that so many people work all of their lives for the grocer, the landlord, the power company, the automobile salesman, and the bank and yet think so little of their own efforts that they pay themselves nothing.

Be prudent, wise, and conservative in your investment programs. It is by consistently and regularly adding to your investments that you will build your emergency and retirement savings. This will add to your progress in becoming self-reliant.

The principle of self-reliance is spiritual as well as temporal. It is not a doomsday program; it is something to be practiced each and every day of our lives. May we continue to hold fast to the eternal truths of self-reliance is my prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.