

## DON'T BE IN A HURRY

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**E**ighteen forty-five was a busy year for the Latter-day Saints in Nauvoo, Illinois. Still mourning the violent death of the Prophet, they continued their efforts to complete the Nauvoo Temple, spread the gospel, and gather believers, even as conflict with critics and dissenters hastened plans for an exodus to the West. On a Sunday in August 1845, Brigham Young paused from the demands of leadership to record a dream he'd had the previous night:

I dreamed... I saw Brother Joseph Smith, and as I was going about my business, he said, "Brother Brigham, don't be in a hurry." Joseph repeated the counsel twice more, with some "degree of sharpness": "Brother Brigham, don't be in a hurry. Brother Brigham, don't be in a hurry."<sup>1</sup>

As important as that message was to Brigham Young in his day, it may be even more vital today. Think how the pace of life has quickened since then, and think of all the things—mundane and meaningful—that compete for our attention every day. We live in a world of fast food, rapid transit, instant messaging, and constant claims about how to get rich quicker, get fit faster, and make it big now. A non-stop information economy constantly markets ideas, images, and sound-bites—some of them virtuous, some of them not. And despite the proliferation of supposed time-saving tools, we often feel pressed and stressed by the demands on our time.

Perhaps this is one meaning of the prophecy that "all things shall be in commotion" in the latter days. If so, it is troubling that the scriptures link this "commotion" with men's hearts failing them (Doctrine and Covenants 45:26; 88:91). As President James E. Faust observes, "Our hurry to meet the relentless demands of the clock tears away at our inner peace."<sup>2</sup>

It's easy to see how love can fade, fear can rise, and sin can harden a distracted heart "in a hurry."

I suggest we pause, lay aside our hurry, and explore some alternatives to "business as usual," as we seek to prepare our hearts for the "great things" which await us (Doctrine and Covenants 45:62). Let's explore four areas where the tendency to "hurry" may blind us to the "immediate goodness of God" (Mosiah 25:10), and then consider how we can obtain the peace he wants us to enjoy, even in a world in commotion.

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## DON'T BE IN A HURRY TO FORGET THE FIRST COMMANDMENT

In the midst of our modern-day frenzy, how well do we remember that our time on earth is actually a gift from God? While we go about our “business,” this earth is hurtling through space, spinning on its axis, and all the while the Lord is “preserving [us] from day to day,” “lending [us] breath to live and move and do” what we will, and “even supporting [us] from one moment to another” (Mosiah 2:21).

Consider the Creator’s magnificent effort to organize our place in the solar system in order to provide us with days and nights and seasons and years. If attentive, we can sense the rhythms of mortal life reminding us that “He first loved us” (1 John 4:19). Do we recall, when complaining that “there’s just never enough time,” that God actually “prolonged” the days of our first fallen parents, granting them time to “repent” and find “joy” in this life and beyond (2 Nephi 2:21, 25)? Can we remember, when peeved at pauses and delays, that we live on borrowed time, purchased by the Savior’s blood, and that everything he does is “for the benefit of the world” (2 Nephi 26:24; see also 1 Corinthians 6:19-20)?

And in return for all he gives us, the Lord invites us to love him. When asked, “Which is the first commandment of all?” Jesus replied, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, . . . soul, . . . mind, and . . . strength: this is the first commandment.”<sup>3</sup> I think we know these words. They harken back to Sinai and have been restated in our day.<sup>4</sup> We may nonetheless forget the power of keeping the first commandment in our hurried pursuit of other good things.

The problem reminds me of a little test teachers sometimes give students to see how well they follow directions. The test is pretty simple, but it uses the press of time, a lengthy list of directions or tasks, and our forgetful tendency to hurry against us. Generally, the instructions look something like this:

1. Read all directions carefully before doing anything.
2. Write your name in the upper right-hand corner of the page.
3. Draw five squares in the upper left-hand corner of the page.
4. Write the city where you were born.
5. Clap your hands three times and say out loud,  
“I am nearly finished. I have followed directions.”
7. Now that you have read all of the directions carefully, go back and do only number two.

Did you recognize the trap? What were those first directions again? Those who “read all directions carefully before doing anything” write their name and sit quietly, while others draw and clap and shout.

Remembering the first great commandment to love the Lord wholeheartedly can save us from far more serious traps. I think that

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this is what President Spencer W. Kimball meant when he said, “We will move faster if we hurry less.” Undistracted by other “gods,” we trust the Lord to help us allocate our “time and talents” to their very best uses each day. As a result, we do more good, and we make real progress.<sup>5</sup>

Years ago, President Ezra Taft Benson asked a great question: “Why did God put the first commandment first?” His answer highlights the grace that flows into our lives when we love the Lord. Not only will we want to keep his other commandments, but he will help us keep them better, granting us wisdom and strength that enhance our capacity to love our neighbors as ourselves. “When we put God first,” President Benson promised, “all other things fall into their proper place or drop out of our lives.” For that reason and others, “We bless our fellowmen the most when we put the first commandment first.”<sup>6</sup>

If you’re wondering what you can do to put God first and love him more deeply, consider the power of the word. President Kimball found that he drew closer to God and loved him more “intensely” when he immersed himself in the scriptures.<sup>7</sup> President Henry B. Eyring taught us to go to the words of prophets because they “help us know [God. And as] we know him better, we love him more.”<sup>8</sup>

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#### DON'T BE IN A HURRY TO DO IT ALL YOURSELF

We are all agents: we’re accountable, and we need to learn to work hard, live providently, and use our time wisely. But we need help. Accepting help does not negate our agency. In fact, the Savior’s atonement actually preserved our agency.<sup>9</sup> This life is more than an earthly career; it is “a time to prepare to meet God; a time to prepare for that endless state... after the resurrection” (Alma 12:24). God knows infinitely more about that state than we do, and so he invites us to “call upon [him] in the name of the Son forevermore” (Moses 5:8).

I love that he asks me to pray and serve in the name of his Son, for I know that I am weak, but the Savior is “full of grace and truth” (Moses 5:7). Nephi explains how I can access the Savior’s grace:

[Ye] must pray always, and not faint;...ye must not perform any thing unto the Lord save in the first place ye shall pray unto the Father in the name of Christ, that he will consecrate thy performance unto thee, that thy performance may be for the welfare of thy soul. (2 Nephi 32:9)

This kind of prayer was modeled for me one morning when I taught at the Missionary Training Center, as a timid senior sister missionary opened our class with a prayer that opened our minds and hearts. When I asked her about it, she said that she had been frightened when asked previously to pray in class, so she had gone alone and prayed to know what to pray. In her weakness, he made her strong, and all of us benefited.

And yet, it seems that many of us live each day like we give talks—we generally remember to close in the name of the Son, but we forget to open the day in his name. Decades after that dream with Joseph, Brigham Young asked a congregation in Utah if they had prayed that morning as families. Observing that many had not, he proposed an all too familiar reason for the omission: “[They were] in too much of a hurry.” I fear that rings familiar for many of us, as time to commune with the Lord gets squeezed in the morning rush hour. As the hymn reminds us, “Ere you left your room this morning, did you think to pray?”<sup>10</sup>

Then President Young gave us wise counsel. “Stop! Wait!” he pleaded, “When you get up in the morning, before you suffer yourselves to eat one mouthful of food, . . . bow down before the Lord, ask him to forgive your sins, and protect you . . . from temptation and all evil, to guide your steps aright, that you may do something that day that shall be beneficial to the kingdom of God on earth.”<sup>11</sup>

That counsel has blessed my life as it reminds me each morning to kneel in prayer before I tackle the tasks ahead. As I pray, I frequently think of the metaphor President Young taught the Saints: “Keep your dish right side up,” he said, “so that when the shower of porridge does come you can catch your dish full.”<sup>12</sup> Do you picture the image? You’ve got your dish; prayer turns it upward to receive; and the porridge is God’s sustaining spiritual gifts, sent to nourish and strengthen you through the demands of the day. Think of it as your daily bread—manna from heaven.

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How sad to dash into the world without thinking to pray, and thereby fail to “catch” our Father’s gifts that day. Too many in college are like the little boy President Faust once described. Asked why he prayed at night but not in the morning, the little boy said, “I ain’t scared in the daytime.”<sup>13</sup> But wait a minute. Daytime is when you do most of your work and face most of your tests. It’s usually scarier than sleeping time, isn’t it? As President Faust put it, “You need help from a power beyond your own to do something extraordinarily useful.”<sup>14</sup> And some days you may need that power just to be ordinarily decent and kind.

Missionaries learn that they can’t do it all themselves, and it shows in their morning devotions. They seek the Lord early in prayer and study, usually calling on him at least a few times before they even leave their apartment. By getting up early and not hurrying past prayer, they prepare themselves for help and guidance later, and thereby bless others in the name of the Son.

My neighbor Joe Woods had such an experience while serving in Trinidad. One day in November, like other days, he and his companion prayed several times before they went to work. Later that day, they had a long walk up Port-au-Spain’s biggest hill to teach an investigator at the home of a local church member, and they were a little behind schedule.

As they hustled up the street, a drunken man named John loudly asked them what they were doing on the island. Now, drunken men are often less than ideal contacts. But this time, despite their hurry, the elders stopped; it may have been John's felt hat or red sneakers, but it was probably something more.

That morning they had practiced teaching with questions, so Elder Woods tried out a couple of questions—"What are you doing? Why are you drunk?" In reply, John asked them to pray for him. There in the street they bowed their heads, and Elder Woods prayed, asking God to help John stop drinking and get baptized (you don't get to pray like that in your own name, but only in the name of the Son). As Elder Woods prayed, John started weeping. It's true that drunken people can weep easily, but this was different. The elders walked a little way with him, made an appointment to teach him the next day, and continued to their previous engagement, arriving late. When they returned to teach John the next day, he struggled to explain what he felt as Elder Woods prayed. It was so new and so powerful that remembering it quenched his thirst for alcohol. Elder Woods' prayer was answered: John stopped drinking, and later he was baptized. Though the missionaries met John in the evening, the story began that morning as they prayerfully prepared to serve.

#### DON'T BE IN A HURRY TO FILL YOUR DAYS WITH "BUSYNESS"

The beehive has long been a symbol of Mormon industry, but as an icon of personal development it is incomplete at best. After all, we are not bees, and the purpose of our life is much higher than making honey. We need to be industrious, for God does not want us to be drones. But neither does he want us simply to be creatures of habit, nor does he want us constantly preoccupied by the busy buzz of the world.

Yet recently national journalist Kenneth Woodward shared the following blunt assessment: "A good Mormon is a busy Mormon."<sup>15</sup> Historian Philip Barlow has also observed that "in Mormon culture... action is esteemed over contemplation." Noting the Church's mandate to prepare the world for the millennium, the author wondered if our sense of "urgency, [initially] fed by noble purposefulness, [might] morph into busyness."<sup>16</sup>

It is true that we have work enough to do, but when it comes to "busyness," we may be taking our cues from the world, rather from the Lord and his servants. Recent sociological studies of the wealthiest countries report "widespread unease in the presence of silence or aloneness, accompanied by a contemporary stunting of the human attention span."<sup>17</sup> I fear this condition may have infected many of us. Uncomfortable with stillness, we substitute noise and motion for insight and progress.

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Try a quick self-examination: How do you respond to silence, stillness, slowness, or even seriousness? Do you relish those contemplative moments, or do you show signs of inattention, indifference, or even irritation in the absence of noise and action?

Try it right now. Sit quietly for one minute of silence. See how comfortable it feels. See what you do with sixty seconds of stillness.

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How comfortable were you? How's your appetite for quiet? Where did your thoughts lead? What did you hear? Did you miss the noise? If you felt some compelling need to escape the stillness for some kind of buzz, you might ask who wants you constantly distracted and never at peace. Elder Neal A. Maxwell cautions us against a “frantic, heedless busyness...[that often] crowds out contemplation and...leaves no room for renewal.” He likens thoughtful “intervals between [our] tasks” to “the green belts of grass, trees, and water that...interrupt the asphalt,” and said that when we “plan some time for contemplation and renewal,” we will feel “drawn” to our work instead of “driven” to it.<sup>18</sup>

Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin observes how easily we fill our lives with “appointments, meetings, and tasks,” and then act frightened at the prospect of some quiet time. Why would that be? He suggests that we may “feel that the busier we are, the more important we are—as though our busyness defines our worth.”<sup>19</sup> On another occasion, he reminds us that “being busy is not necessarily being spiritual”—for in fact, noise and “busyness” can actually crowd out the “still small voice” of the Spirit.<sup>20</sup>

President Gordon B. Hinckley has expressed similar concerns,<sup>21</sup> and in the October 2007 general conference, Elder Dallin H. Oaks pointed out that we may busy ourselves with pleasure as easily as work. With so many outlets for entertainment and diversion, he warned us that “Some young people are amusing themselves to death—spiritual death.” He urged us to forego such diversions, even if they are “good,” when they come at the expense of things that are “best.”<sup>22</sup>

Does Brigham Young's diagnosis sound familiar? “[You] are all the time on the wing, and in such a hurry that you do not know what to do first.”<sup>23</sup> I'm sad to say I've caught that fever at times (and it makes me tired). Elder Wirthlin described it as spending “a lifetime whirling about at a feverish pace, checking off list after list of things that in the end really don't matter.”<sup>24</sup>

President Hinckley has prescribed a remedy for this fever of busyness. He learned it from his father and from President David O. McKay. The remedy is meditation, pondering, or introspection, and he says we need at least some time meditating so that our minds and spirits can develop. Surely this is one way we differ from bees. President Hinckley recalls that his father “never ceased growing” because he made time for “thinking, meditating, [and] pondering.”<sup>25</sup> You may have to turn off your TV,

computer, cell phone, or MP3 player, but it's worth it. As Sister Bonnie D. Parkin put it: "Take time to slow down and ponder so that you can feel the Lord's love for you."<sup>26</sup>

Some years ago, President Hinckley offered a special Christmas gift to every member of the Church. This gift, he promised, would help us understand the "true essence of Christmas," and feel the peace of Christ, the love of Christ, and "an overwhelming sense of gratitude" to Him. So what was the prophet's Christmas gift? It was one hour "spent in silent meditation and quiet reflection on the wonder and the majesty of this, the Son of God."<sup>27</sup> Do you remember getting that gift? Would you prize it? Do you understand the directions? They are pretty simple: spend one hour, in silence, thinking of the Savior. Remember the results: peace, love, and "overwhelming" gratitude.

#### DON'T BE IN A HURRY TO BE DONE

Do you know the feeling, "I wish I were done"? Occasionally, we get this feeling grading papers or assignments, and that is probably alright, but we also tend to feel this way about more important things. It is a mistake to want to rush redemption, whether for ourselves or others. This hurry to be done crops up in the way we think and talk about our testimony, our conversion, and the Lord's redeeming work in the world. If we hurry, however, we can short-circuit the marvel of conversion and miss the moments that God has given us to help us feel his love and renew our hope in Christ.

"There seems to be little evidence," Elder Richard L. Evans once said, "that the Creator of the universe was ever in a hurry. Everywhere, on this bounteous and beautiful earth...there is evidence of patient purpose and planning and working and waiting."<sup>28</sup> Think about that—do you ever picture God in a hurry? Was there anything frantic about the wonder of creation? Have you read any evidence of a mad dash to guard the tree of life after Adam and Eve partook of the forbidden fruit? When young Joseph Smith found himself in the fight of his life, "seized upon" by a powerful "enemy" who wanted to choke his prayer with "despair" and destroy him; when it took "all [of Joseph's] powers [simply] to call upon God to deliver him"; "at this moment of great alarm"—how did deliverance come? In a "pillar of light...which descended gradually until it fell upon" Joseph (Joseph Smith—History 1:15-17). The Father and the Son were in no hurry, for they were masters of the situation.

Do we want to be tutored by such masters? If we do, we should recognize that their pace and timing may be different from our own. Remembering the patient and watchful care with which they prepared the schoolroom of this earth, we can anticipate a long and wondrous tutorial when it comes to the "perfecting" of their saints. Paul described

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their aim for us this way: “Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13). To learn and grow into the “stature of the fulness of Christ” is an awesome aim, and it is not an overnight project.

Are we ready? Where do we begin? For me, it is significant that the first step King Benjamin taught his people about becoming Saints was to yield “to the enticings of the Holy Spirit” (Mosiah 3:19). Learning to yield is foundational, I think, to the instruction that follows. It is certainly prerequisite to more advanced tutorials, which require us to be “meek, humble, patient, full of love, [and] willing to submit” to whatever the Lord requires (Mosiah 3:19). The word “yield” reminds me of another verb—to “let”—as in “let the Holy Spirit guide”;<sup>29</sup> or “let the solemnities of eternity rest upon your mind” (Doctrine and Covenants 43:34); or “let your hearts be comforted” (Doctrine and Covenants 98:1); or “let your hearts rejoice” (Doctrine and Covenants 100:12).

Still, many of us grow impatient with our progress, continually seeking hints that the Lord is really working with us, that our efforts please him, and that we are changing for the better. In a frantic search for approval, we may even settle for “the honors of men” or ask for a sign “that [we] may consume it upon [our lusts]” (Doctrine and Covenants 121:35; 46:9). Instead, we need to “ask with a firmness unshaken...that [we] will serve the true and living God” (Mormon 9:28). If we commit our hearts and minds to love and serve God and our neighbors, our “small” deeds will bring about something “great” in us, even though “all things must come to pass in their time” (Doctrine and Covenants 64:31-33).

President Boyd K. Packer states that we grow “taller in testimony” like our bodies grow in stature, which makes it hard to notice because both occur slowly over time. He pleads, “Do not be impatient to gain great spiritual knowledge. Let it grow, help it grow, but do not force it or you will open the way to be misled.”<sup>30</sup>

Think about the metaphor Alma used to show how testimony and conversion progress—it was a seed that grows into a tree. Have you ever planted a tree from a seed? It takes time! And this particular tree is designed to last forever, bearing fruit that is “sweet above all that is sweet,...and pure above all that is pure.” Surely such a tree—whether just sprouting or more deeply rooted—deserves our “faith,” “diligence” and “patience” (Alma 32:37, 40-43).

If you are still in a hurry to be done, remember President Benson’s description of the process: “Becoming Christ-like is a lifetime pursuit and very often involves growth and change that is slow, almost imperceptible.” “Almost” is an important word in this statement. If we are in a hurry, the growth will be imperceptible, but if we slow down, God will help us

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perceive true progress. As the song says, “Take time to be holy; let Him be thy guide” in times of prayer, study, meditation, and other periods of reflection, such as the sacrament and temple service. “The Lord is pleased with every effort,” declares President Benson, “even the tiny, daily ones in which we strive to become more like Him,” and if we let Him, He can tell us so.<sup>31</sup>

In these quiet moments, we may remember the invitation we heard when God’s servants confirmed us members of the Church: “Receive the Holy Ghost.” And as President Eyring has taught, we choose to accept that invitation “not [just] once, but every day, every hour, every minute.”<sup>32</sup> In doing so, we let the Lord renew our hope and teach us what we lack as yet to become godly—to grow into the “stature of the fulness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13; Moroni 8:26). And he does this patiently, “line upon line, and precept upon precept.” For he is not in a hurry, and he knows that we are like “little children” who “cannot bear all things now,” so he has promised, “I will lead you along” (Doctrine and Covenants 78:17-18).

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#### BE STILL, AND KNOW THAT I AM GOD

Perhaps this article may be summarized in eight words by the psalmist long ago, “Be still, and know that I am God.” The Lord reaffirmed this counsel in our day, during a time of great commotion for the Prophet Joseph and early members of the Church (Psalms 46:10; Doctrine and Covenants 101:16). “Be still, and know that I am God.” Perhaps this can be read as two separate commands, but it also works especially well as a statement of cause and effect. If we will be still, put God first, call on him first, and wait on him always, then we will come to discern his “still small voice,” reminding us how well he knows us and how much he loves us, and he will teach us how to love and serve our neighbors as ourselves (1 Kings 19:12; 1 Nephi 17:45). As we do so, the promise is sure, “even peace in this world, and eternal life in the world to come” (Doctrine and Covenants 59:23). ∞

#### NOTES

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- 3 Mark 12:28-30; see also Deuteronomy 6:5 and Matthew 22:37.
- 4 See Exodus 20:2; Doctrine and Covenants 59:5.
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- 6 Ezra Taft Benson, “The Great Commandment—Love the Lord,” *Ensign* (May 1988), 4, 6.
- 7 Spencer W. Kimball, *Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, (Salt Lake City, 2006), 135.

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