

Speaking Today

Infinite Needs and Finite Resources

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Faced with ever-louder cries for help from the world, how do we determine where to focus our efforts?

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Today's headlines are filled with accounts of natural disasters, extreme poverty, wars, terrorism, vicious murders, diseases, **and** all manner of evil. The Lord has warned us of the events of our day, some certainly yet future:

"**And** the voice of warning shall be unto all people, by the mouths of my disciples, whom I have chosen in these last days." (D&C 1:4.)

The Lord has told us that after the testimonies of His servants "cometh the testimony of earthquakes, that shall cause groanings in the midst of [the earth]. ...

"**And** also cometh the testimony of the voice of thunderings, ... lightnings, ... tempests, **and** ... waves of the sea heaving themselves beyond their bounds." (D&C 88:89-90.)

"**And** in that day shall be heard of wars **and** rumors of wars. ...

"**And** the love of men shall wax cold, **and** iniquity shall abound." (D&C 45:26-27.)

"**And** plagues shall go forth." (D&C 84:97.)

"**And** the whole earth shall be in commotion." (D&C 45:26.)

Some of the greatest disasters are social **and** are occurring in places of relative peace **and** prosperity. It is sobering **and** saddening to view a world so full of pain. It is ironic that at a time when the fulness of the truth is available, society in general is choosing its own way of life under the banner of liberation **and** freedom. The cause **and** effect of following incorrect principles is coming into play, **and** we find pain **and** suffering everywhere in the form of broken homes, bodies, minds, **and** spirits.

Hence, we live in a world where there exists an **infinite** need for remedial help requiring financial **and** human **resources** of which there is a **finite** supply. If we lived in a world where gospel principles were understood **and** practiced by all mankind, **resources** would be adequate for all **needs**. The Lord has assured us: "It is my purpose to provide for my saints, for all things are mine.

"But it must **needs** be done in mine own way; **and** behold this is the way that I, the Lord, have decreed to provide for my saints, that the poor shall be exalted, in that the rich are made low.

“For the earth is full, **and** there is enough **and** to spare.” (D&C 104:15-17.)

“Thou Wilt Remember the Poor”

The scriptural charge relative to taking care of the casualties of our society is abundantly clear in our dispensation. On 2 January 1831, only nine months after the Church was organized, the Lord said: “**And** for your salvation I give unto you a commandment, for I have heard your prayers, **and** the poor have complained before me, **and** the rich have I made, **and** all flesh is mine, **and** I am no respecter of persons.” (D&C 38:16.)

Just one month later the Lord said: “If thou lovest me thou shalt serve me **and** keep all my commandments.

“**And** behold, thou wilt remember the poor, **and** consecrate of thy properties for their support.” (D&C 42:29-30.)

The importance of this commandment was dramatically illustrated again, in June of the same year, in a revelation received by the Prophet Joseph Smith. The Lord directed twenty-eight of the elders to travel two by two from Kirtland to Jackson County, Missouri. They were to go by different routes, preaching the gospel as they went. They were destitute **and** had to travel through primitive country. This was the background against which the Lord said to these men as they started, “Remember in all things the poor **and** the needy, the sick **and** the afflicted, for he that doeth not these things, the same is not my disciple.” (D&C 52:40.) Even though the missionaries were nearly destitute, the Lord said, “Remember ... the poor **and** the needy.”

It is worthy to note to whom the commandments to take care of the poor were given. My review of the scriptures on this subject suggests to my mind that it is more of an individual responsibility than an institutional one. The Church gets involved to make it easier for the members to accomplish this objective. For example, bishops are called who receive sacred donations from members **and**, with the mantle of bishop, make judgments as to which members are in need. This does not or should not deprive any of us of the opportunity to help each other one-on-one. However, if it were left up to individuals alone, without some form of organization, there would be inefficiencies. Some people would receive more than they need **and** others would receive nothing because we may not be aware of their need.

By contributing tithes **and** fast offerings, we help people in our ward, stake, **and** nation, **and** the Saints in poverty-stricken areas. We need the Church organization to help us reach our brothers **and** sisters in faraway places. In the Lord's wisdom, bishops are called from the people over whom they will preside. Each bishop knows the people of his ward individually **and** collectively. He understands the local culture. When he was ordained a bishop, he received a mantle which enables him to discern to whom help should be given. Hence, in taking care of our poor members throughout the world, the Church, as an institution, facilitates a member's individual responsibility in caring for the needy.

On the issue of helping people outside our own church, Joseph Smith stated, “Respecting how much a man ... shall give annually [to constitute good membership] we have no special instructions to give; he is to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to provide for the widow, to dry up the tear of the orphan, to comfort the afflicted, whether in this church, or in any other, or in no church at all, wherever he finds them.” (*Times and Seasons*, 15 March 1842.)

As a scriptural mandate, I like **Alma 1:30**: “**And** thus, in their prosperous circumstances, they did not send away any who were naked, or that were hungry, or that were athirst, or that were sick, or that had not been nourished; **and** they did not set their hearts upon riches; therefore they were liberal to all, both old **and** young, both bond **and** free, both male **and** female, whether out of the church or in the church, having no respect to persons as to those who stood in need.”

Reaching Out

My testimony on the issue of reaching out beyond the walls of our own church increased eight years ago when I was the managing director of the welfare program of the Church. At that time, we began seeing television documentaries about the drought conditions in Ethiopia.

Many of you wrote letters to the Church asking if there was a way the Church could get involved. With sensitivity to the plight of the starving people in Africa **and** sensitivity to your desires to help, the First Presidency called a special fast in January **and** again in November of 1985. As a result, many millions of dollars were donated to help alleviate the suffering. A detailed study was made **and** recommendations were given as to how we could best ensure your contributions reached the people in need.

In final preparation to determine how to spend the funds donated in the first special fast, Elder M. Russell Ballard **and** I went to Ethiopia to see the situation firsthand. We had some heart-wrenching, soul-stretching, **and** faith-promoting experiences. Neither of us will be the same again. Some of my most vivid memories are not the terrible suffering we witnessed, which you saw on your television screens, but the great outpouring of love **and** service exhibited by nations of the world. We saw doctors **and** nurses giving humanitarian service in deplorable settings. They were tired, but smiling.

We learned of a Catholic priest who had been laboring in the drought- **and** war-stricken province of Tigre for eleven years. He saw a need **and** was trying to help long before the television **and** news accounts made it fashionable.

We saw an Ethiopian man, who was perhaps eighty years old, stumble into the feeding station camp with a desperate, beaten look on his face. He was obviously starving to death. However, on the way to the feeding station he had passed a deserted village **and** heard the cry of a baby. He searched until he found the baby sitting on the ground next to his dead mother. In spite of this man's emaciated condition, he picked up the baby **and** carried him in his arms for twenty-five miles to the feeding station. The man had a look of glassy-eyed bewilderment, **and** his first words were not "I'm hungry" or "Help me." They were "What can be done for this baby I found?"

I feel that the members of our Church should be doing all we can to alleviate suffering. I am thrilled with the fact that our full-time missionaries now devote several hours of their week to community service. When followed properly, this program does not detract from the primary goal of missionaries but enhances that goal.

I had an experience in Guatemala observing some welfare missionaries, **and** it had a great impact on me. When the welfare sisters walked onto the church grounds, the atmosphere became electric. Men, women, **and** children alike ran to them **and** embraced them. I was told the sisters had helped them through a recent epidemic. They had helped deliver some babies **and** were present when some members of the families had died. They had brought food for both the soul **and** the body.

Knowing that we have been commanded to care for the poor **and** needy within **and** without the Church, what priorities should be placed on those two activities?

President Joseph F. Smith addressed this when he said: "I want to tell you that we will be honest with you; we feel that it is the first duty of Latter-day Saints to take care of themselves **and** of their poor; **and** then, if we can extend it to others, **and** as wide **and** as far as we can extend charity **and** assistance to others that are not members of the Church, we feel that it is our duty to do it. But first look after the members of our own household. The man who will not provide for his own house, as one of old has said, is worse than an infidel." (*Gospel Doctrine*, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1939, p. 308.)

Some have criticized this doctrine. I have heard comments such as "The Church takes care of its own but doesn't do anything for anyone else." This is not only unfair but untrue. However, our first responsibility, our covenant responsibility, if you will, is to take care of our own.

A Sincere Love of Mankind

I testify to you that in today's environment there is room for both caring for our own **and** helping with the problems in the world's society. Building the kingdom **and** improving the world are not mutually exclusive. In fact, they are compatible **and** complementary. When asked which of all the commandments was the greatest, the Lord said: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, **and** with all thy soul, **and** with all thy mind.

"This is the first **and** great commandment.

"**And** the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." (**Matt. 22:37-39**)

The greatest commandment, to love God, was not given priority at the expense or exclusion of the second commandment, to love our neighbor. I cannot comprehend **and** indeed do not feel it is possible to love the Lord **and** not love our neighbors. I have seen some express tearful testimony **and** love for the Savior who show no warmth whatsoever to God's children. I do not think a sincere love of the Savior is possible without a sincere love of mankind. Neither do I believe it is possible to have sincere love **and** concern for Church members at the exclusion of the rest of God's children.

Compassion knows no political or religious boundaries. We simply must keep these things in balance as a church **and** as individuals. Just as there must be balance in missionary work, temple work, **and** ward work, we must use wisdom in finding an appropriate balance of financial **and** human **resources** in providing for the poor **and** needy. We, as members of the Church, are outnumbered in the world 665 to 1. We cannot do everything, but still we must do everything we can.

In January 1992 it was announced that members can contribute to the humanitarian fund. This fund will be used in the same manner as the special fast fund during the Ethiopian crisis. This is a practical accommodation to the members who want to contribute to help alleviate the plight of those suffering throughout the world irrespective of their religious affiliation.

I cannot emphasize enough that this humanitarian thrust of the Church is not meant to be something imposed on members, but merely made available to them. Neither should it be thought of as the only outlet. There are many good organizations doing wonderful work. We don't want our effort to be viewed as lack of support for any of these organizations. We applaud all organizations that are sincerely trying to improve the lives of God's children.

Two Basic Goals

There is an eternal significance to why the Church is just the facilitator for the members in matters of providing for the poor **and** needy. There are two basic goals accomplished when we fulfill the commandment to care for the poor. The most obvious is the relief of suffering or the lifting of the spirit of the person to whom the service is given. The second is more subtle but is of eternal consequence. It has to do with the sanctification of the giver. President Marion G. Romney said, "Living the law of consecration exalts the poor **and** humbles the rich. In the process, both are sanctified. The poor, released from the bondage **and** humiliating limitations of poverty, are enabled as free men to rise to their full potential, both temporally **and** spiritually. The rich, by consecration **and** the imparting of their surplus for the benefit of the poor, *not by constraint, but willingly as an act of free will*, evidence that charity for their fellowmen characterized by Mormon as 'the pure love of Christ.' (**Moro. 7:47.**) This will bring both the giver **and** receiver to the common ground on which the Spirit of God can meet them." (*Ensign*, Nov. 1981, p. 93.)

I have thought of this often **and** have reached the conviction that in a strange way those who *have* are actually dependent upon those who have not. Something spiritual happens to a person when he reaches out to help someone else. President Kimball put it this way, "As givers gain control of their desires **and** properly see other **needs** in light of their own wants, then the powers of the gospel are released in their lives. They learn that by living the great law of consecration they insure not only temporal salvation but also spiritual sanctification." (*Ensign*, Nov. 1977, p. 77.)

If individuals completely abdicate to the Church their responsibility of caring for the poor, this beautiful phenomenon does not occur. This is true whether the help is going to members or nonmembers. I say this because there may be a tendency to pay tithing **and** fast offerings **and** make an occasional donation to the humanitarian fund **and** feel all has been taken care of. The greatest sanctification takes place with person-to-person help. Hence, the greatest compassionate service each of us can give may be in our own neighborhoods **and** communities. Wherever we live in the world, there is pain **and** sorrow all around us. We need to take more initiative as individuals in deciding how we can best be of service.

I am so pleased that the projects which went on throughout the world as part of the Relief Society sesquicentennial celebration (1992) were local service projects. There was some thought given to having wards in more affluent countries reach out across the ocean **and** help sister wards in impoverished nations. Instead, an inspired determination was that projects would be done on a local basis. I see two great benefits arising from that decision. Both support the doctrine outlined earlier, which is the sanctification coming from person-to-person service. If projects had been undertaken five thousand miles away instead of in your own backyard, you would have missed seeing firsthand the joy in the face of a lonely old man or woman in a nursing home, or the thanksgiving expressed by a woman you met in a crisis center, or the tears of gratitude expressed by the invalid who had her home spring-cleaned for the first time in ten years. We don't do these things for firsthand credit or to have the person's profuse gratitude, but something very spiritual happens between giver **and** receiver of personal service. Both are edified, **and** a spiritual bonding takes place. A love comes into the heart which is large enough to encompass not only the person served but all of God's children.

Another benefit I have seen from the Relief Society's keeping projects close to home rather than across the sea is what my wife **and** I observed at the Relief Society sesquicentennial celebration in Ghana. She went to a ward meeting **and** experienced their excitement to be involved in a service project at the same time as sisters were involved all over the world. If they had been the recipients of service, they would have appreciated it **and** loved you for it, but something would have been lost in the process. They would have met together in a spirit of thanksgiving for what they had received. However, they would not have experienced the sanctification of giving. With the program adopted by the General Relief Society Presidency, sisters throughout the world were brought together by a common bond of giving.

All People Need to Give

One thing we cannot overlook is that all people need to give. This is true of affluent Saints **and** the poorest of the poor. Poverty is a relative term. It means something much different in one country than in another. There is no common solution or program for every situation. However, principles are universal. We cannot bring everyone to the same economic level. To do so would violate principles **and** foster dependence rather than independence. People living in each country have the primary responsibility for solving their own problems. They must sacrifice for each other in order that they can experience the sanctification which comes from giving.

During a trip to South America a few years ago, I spoke with a stake president whose stake had experienced over 50 percent unemployment of members during the previous three years. I knew the stake had received less than two hundred dollars in assistance from the area office during that period. I asked him how the members had been able to survive without a large infusion of outside help. His answer was the families had helped each other—not just father, mother, sons, **and** daughters, but uncles, aunts, **and** cousins. When a cousin got a job, the money earned went to benefit everyone. In addition, ward members looked after each other **and** shared what they had, however meager. With tears in his eyes, he explained how close his stake members were to each other **and** to the Lord. Their spirituality had increased manyfold. We could have poured money into this stake from Provo **and** felt good about it. However, in so doing we would have robbed them of the opportunity to serve each other **and** become sanctified in the process.

As I travel in countries where poverty is high, I am constantly asked “When is the Church going to” questions. When will the Church build us a hospital, school, factory, etc.? The solutions to poverty are extremely complex, **and** the balance between too much aid **and** not enough is very elusive. Our compassion can lead to failure if we give aid without creating independence **and** self-reliance in the recipient. However, there is a state of human misery below which no Latter-day Saint should descend as long as others are living in abundance. Can some of us be content living affluent life-styles while others cannot afford the chlorine to purify their water? I struggle constantly with this balance. I believe I have learned a divine truth, however. I cannot become sanctified without serving others, **and** I will be held accountable if I rob another of the opportunity to give service.

We Must Also Give of Ourselves

None of us can ignore the **needs** of those around us **and** have the Spirit of the Lord accompany us. His example of what we should be doing with our lives is vivid. This is taught by His actions louder than His words. I am increasingly touched by *what He did* on His way to deliver the Sermon on the Mount as well as by what He said in the sermon.

We should keep the Savior’s example in mind as we work together in the Church programs to take care of the poor. If we aren’t careful, we can depersonalize the activity by giving money **and** walking away **and** assuming “the Church” will do the rest. We cannot, as individuals, be spectators to the pain **and** suffering around us **and** sit idly by **and** expect sanctification to take place in our lives. We cannot allow organizational lines to set up a layer of protection between a person in pain **and** ourselves, if we are in a position to help. There is a limit to how much we should rely on institutional welfare. To rely too heavily on it would deny ourselves a sanctifying experience.

Without this perspective, there is danger in setting up an organizational structure that does indeed provide more efficiency but which also becomes an organizational wall between ourselves **and** people in need; at the first sign of someone in need, we automatically release ourselves from reaching out because, after all, we are not their bishop or even their home or visiting teacher. Often there is a cry for help that has your name preceding it, **and** you may be the only one who can hear the cry.

I trust we will continue to see humanitarian aid given by the Church as long as it effectively facilitates our individual desires to reach out to the poor **and** needy. Bishops will continue to be the key figures in coordinating our responsibility to take care of our own. However, the primary responsibility of the commandment to care for the poor is our own individual responsibility. We should give financial contributions when possible, but this alone is not complete. We must also give of ourselves. We can oftentimes give of ourselves when a financial contribution is not possible.

As I speak about “taking care of the poor,” I am referring to the broad array of affliction the people in the world are experiencing in our day. A person could give every excess dime beyond that which is sufficient for his **needs and** fall far short of meeting the **needs** of the people. The full meaning includes bringing support **and** comfort to those suffering in mind, body, **and** spirit. Money cannot buy the pure love of Christ. It can only be bought by sacrifice.

I realize that, for some, with the demands placed on you by your families, close friends, **and** Church callings, there is not much left to save the world. Sanctification comes from service rendered to our own families as well as to strangers. It has not been my objective to take you on a guilt trip but to teach some principles of caring for the needy. You **and** only you know your own unique situation **and** can determine how these principles can be applied at your particular age **and** circumstances.

My promise is that as you review these **infinite needs** in relation to your **finite resources**, you will be able to formulate a plan which will give the appropriate balance. I can also promise you that the things the gospel asks of us are not mutually exclusive but are complementary to each other. Speaking for myself **and** all of the Brethren, I give you our heartfelt love **and** gratitude for all you are **and** all you do.

Gospel topics: compassion, disasters, priorities, service, welfare

[photo] Photo by Steve Bunderson

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