

# The Blessing of Work

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Work is not a matter of economic need alone; it is a spiritual necessity. In these stormy economic times, surely the commandment to work is among the commandments the Lord is prepared to help us keep.

Those who have spent time on or around the ocean know how changeable it is. Waves, tides, currents, and winds are constantly shifting and interacting. Successful sailors and fishers learn to ride the waves and tides and to use the winds and currents in order to safely go where they need to go.

The world is also changeable, and the rate of change seems to be accelerating. Part of the great ebb and flow of our variable world occurs in the changing employment market. Fortunately, just as sailors use acquired skills, charts, and other aids to navigate successfully, there are resources and learnable skills that can help us navigate changing employment conditions. Those who are skilled not only at working but at finding work can best navigate these changing times.

## A Commandment and a Blessing

Today, many have forgotten the value of work. Some falsely believe that the highest goal in life is to achieve a condition in which one no longer needs to work. President David O. McKay (1873–1970) was fond of saying, “Let us realize that the privilege to work is a gift, that power to work is a blessing, that love of work is success.” <sup>1</sup>

Work is not a matter of economic need alone; it is a spiritual necessity. Our Father in Heaven works to bring about our salvation and exaltation (see Moses 1:39). And, beginning with Adam, He has commanded us to work. Even in the Garden of Eden, Adam was instructed to “dress [till] it and keep it” (Genesis 2:15). After the Fall, Adam was told, “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread” (Genesis 3:19). As with any other commandment, there is joy in its keeping. To work—honestly and productively—brings contentment and a sense of self-worth. Having done all we can to be self-reliant, to provide for our own needs and those of our family, we can turn to the Lord in confidence to ask for what we might yet lack.

## Gifts, Talents, Interests

Heavenly Father has given us all talents and gifts that can help us provide for ourselves and our families. Learning to recognize our talents and gifts—and

interests—is an important first step in career preparation. President Henry B. Eyring, First Counselor in the First Presidency, learned from his father, Henry Eyring, to choose a career that complemented his interests.

Because of his love for science, Professor Henry Eyring encouraged his sons to major in physics as preparation for a career in science. While President Eyring was studying physics at the University of Utah, he had an exchange with his father that changed his career direction. He asked his father for help with a complex mathematical problem. “My father was at a blackboard we kept in the basement,” President Eyring recalls. “Suddenly he stopped. ‘Hal,’ he said, ‘we were working this same kind of problem a week ago. You don’t seem to understand it any better now than you did then. Haven’t you been working on it?’”

A little chagrined, President Eyring admitted he had not. President Eyring recalls his father’s response: “When I told him no, my father paused. It was really a very tender and poignant moment, because I knew how much he loved me and how much he wanted me to be a scientist. Then he said, ‘Hal, I think you’d better get out of physics. You ought to find something that you love so much that when you don’t have to think about anything, that’s what you think about.’” 2

### **Training and Education**

When we have examined our own interests and abilities and when we have taken counsel from those who know and love us—especially the Lord—we need to seek both education and experience in our chosen career field. Education and training are among the most worthwhile investments anyone can make.

Learn to love learning. Just as it is important to continue making deposits to a savings account, it is important to continue educating yourself in your chosen profession or career so that your skills will always be marketable. Just as a sailor keeps an eye on the horizon for changing weather, keeping up-to-date in your career will help you spot changing conditions in your field and make necessary course corrections.

### **Giving and Accepting Help**

None of us is alone on the ocean; we are part of a great fleet. And just as a naval fleet has numerous support vessels, the Church has bishops and branch presidents, Relief Society presidents, quorum presidents, employment specialists, and others who stand ready to help us get underway. Such help often includes directing us to resources and training that fit our specific situations—such as writing a résumé, conducting an effective job search, and learning to present ourselves well in interviews.

Long before the term *networking* came into use, sailors exchanged information about such things as dangerous shoals, new routes, and sources of supply. A sailor about to enter unfamiliar waters would talk to everyone who might have useful information and experience to share. In today’s employment environment, establishing and maintaining contact with those who have useful information or experience is equally vital. Local ward or branch leaders and extended family are good starting points.

## **Teaching Children to Work**

One of parents' most important responsibilities is to teach their children to work. Even young children can begin to experience the benefits of working when they are involved in household chores and in service to others. Wise parents will work alongside their children, will provide frequent praise, and will make sure no task is overwhelming.

When President Thomas S. Monson was young, his parents taught him the principle of work by their examples. His father, a printer, worked long and hard practically every day of his life. When he was home, he did not stop working in order to take a well-deserved rest. He continued to work by providing service to family and neighbors alike.<sup>3</sup> His mother was always working to provide some needed service to a family member or friend. President Monson's parents often asked him to accompany them or to do some service for them, allowing him to learn firsthand about working to serve others.

President Monson learned from his father how to work in business and began his first part-time job when he was 14, working in the printing shop that his father managed. President Monson relates that after age 14, there have not been many days in his life—other than Sundays—when he didn't work. "When you learn to work while you're young, the habit stays with you," he says.<sup>4</sup>

## **Blessings of Persistence**

In matters of employment, as with most everything else we are called upon to do in life, it is vital that we move forward. When we do our best, seeking both human and divine guidance and trusting in our loving Heavenly Father, He will bless the outcome.

As a young man, President Dieter F. Uchtdorf, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, wanted a different work experience than that of a laundry delivery boy for his family. He did not overly enjoy the cart, the heavy bike, or the work; nevertheless, he worked hard to help his family.

He relates the following regarding a blessing that came from that challenging work experience:

"Many years later, when I was about to be drafted into the military, I decided to volunteer instead and join the Air Force to become a pilot. I loved flying and thought being a pilot would be my thing.

"To be accepted for the program I had to pass a number of tests, including a strict physical exam. The doctors were slightly concerned by the results and did some additional medical tests. Then they announced, 'You have scars on your lung which are an indication of a lung disease in your early teenage years, but obviously you are fine now.' The doctors wondered what kind of treatment I had gone through to heal the disease. Until the day of that examination I had never known that I had any kind of lung disease. Then it became clear to me that my regular exercise in fresh air as a laundry boy had been a key factor in my healing from this illness. Without the extra effort of pedaling that heavy bicycle day in and day out, pulling the laundry cart up

and down the streets of our town, I might never have become a jet fighter pilot and later a 747 airline captain. ...

“If I had only known back then what I learned many years later—if I had only been able to see *the end from the beginning*—I would have had a better appreciation of these experiences, and it would have made my job so much easier.” 5

### **Setting Sail**

In these stormy economic times, when the tide of opportunity seems to be ebbing, when the winds and currents seem to oppose our progress, it is vital to remember that the Lord gives no commandments unto the children of men “save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them” (1 Nephi 3:7). Surely the commandment to work to sustain self and family is among the commandments the Lord is prepared to help us keep.

For some, the challenge may seem daunting, as Nephi’s challenge surely was when he gazed upon an ocean that stretched beyond the horizon. A young man of the desert was to become a shipbuilder and a sailor. That is a career change. Nephi sought instruction and went to work (see 1 Nephi 17:8–11). Even so today, the Lord will bless us as we continue to sacrifice and serve in the kingdom and as we embark with faith, knowing that we do not sail alone.