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Challenges of the Faithful Physician

Balancing Community,
Family, Church, and Practice

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The title of this presentation implies the existence of challenges and potential problems for the physician in the juggling of the responsibilities attendant to the spheres mentioned. While there are many interesting ways to look at the process of being "faithful," I like the notion of being *loyal* to one's ideals or values in these important areas. The Bible dictionary in our new scriptures tell us that "Faith is a principle of action and power." Thus, being *faithful* or *loyal* to anything should mean that we support, pursue, and defend our areas of interest and involvement in affirmative, active ways. Since "true faith must be based upon correct knowledge or it cannot produce the desired results" (Bible dictionary), our loyalty and faithfulness must be directed to those things that have true value and worth.

The demands and expectations placed on the shoulders of the current LDS physician who is trying to maintain superb citizenship in family, church, profession, and community are heavy, and often potentially conflicting. Before we become buried in self-pity or consumed in wrenching self-analysis, however, let us remember that not everyone may appreciate our plight.

At the beginning of my academic career, I had the privilege and heartaches of service as the assistant dean for admissions at our medical school. I spent countless hours with wonderful young people who quite literally would have given anything for the blessings of grappling with your problems. In this sense, the unemployed miner or trucker has an advantage: Everyone can relate to his plight and frustrations. Few find much pity for the financially comfortable, socially respected (or envied) physician even though, like everyone else in life, he or she has concerns, disappointments, and worries.

My thesis is that we should try to see ourselves as others see us in terms of capitalizing on the increased, broad privileges and opportunities that are afforded us as physicians by society, rather than allowing ourselves to be trapped in the negative frustrations of overcommitment and unfulfillment.

James N. Kimball, a noted local author, businessman, and social commentator has made some observations that we may find amusing if not insightful. He contrasts physicians with himself and almost anyone else and feels maligned. If the doctor works late, he is dedicated to his patients. If the businessman misses dinner with his family, he is "money grubbing" or has troubles at home. If the physician misses a church meeting or comes late or sleeps through the service, it is evidence of his devotion to the sick. If anyone else does any of the above, his testimony or seriousness is questioned. If his beeper goes off and kills the spirit of a meeting or disrupts the concert, the poor doctor never has a minute to himself and so forth. In short, the honored profession of medicine provides the opportunity, in socially sanctioned ways, for the physician to essentially neglect virtually all other areas of responsibility in his life if he but makes the modest effort to practice

medicine well.

While these observations reflect the status and opportunities of physicians in most of our societies, they also hold keys for some of the insidious traps in which we may find ourselves if we are not careful and well grounded in our values, philosophies, and actual practices of daily living. Milton Mayer made the following comment, that unfortunately may contain more than a grain of truth: "One of the things the average doctor doesn't have time to do is catch up with the things he didn't learn in school, and one of the things he didn't learn in school is the nature of human society, its purpose, its history, and its needs. . . . If medicine is necessarily a mystery to the average man, nearly everything else is necessarily a mystery to the average doctor."

We as Latter-day Saint physicians have excuse for neither global ignorance nor ignoring the rest of life. We now have many examples of those in our midst who have sensed the opportunity and responsibility for excellence in multiple involvements and have not paid the unacceptable price of mediocrity in profession, family, or other spheres. Some still hide behind the armored cloak of our professionalism and have earned the same description made by Voltaire of Charles XII of Sweden: "He carried his virtues to such an extreme that they were worse than their contrary vices." Few seriously doubt the desirability of balanced concerns and activities. The difficult question for most of us is how to accomplish all that we wish to do and achieve proper balance in our lives

In my judgment, balance does not mean equal emphasis on everything we care about all the time. For most of us, our internship year was not only the most intense, but also the most productive medical learning experience of our lives. We could not be where we are today without it, yet no one would accuse

it of being a balanced social or emotional experience. Much could be said in a similar vein about full-time Church missions, for those of us who have the privilege of serving, or even for the short, but intense, experience one has in the labor and delivery room as either a new mom or dad! Thus, being faithful or loyal to those things that we honor means giving them proper attention and emphasis at the proper times in our lives. The chief of staff of a hospital spends time differently than does the physician/bishop. A doctor member of the Tabernacle Choir has different activities occupying his time than does the young physician with several small children who is involved with Pinewood Derbies and polishing shoes for Primary. A key to remember is that there is "a time to every purpose under heaven" (Ecclesiastes 3:1), and that purposes may change even as times change.

A problem for many of us is that as times *have* changed, we have not yet been able to fully focus on what should be our present, primary purposes. We have achieved our basic goals for which we have worked for many years and are now searching. We have graduated from school and finished our training. We have married the beautiful girl or handsome man of our dreams and many have the precocious children we once dreamed of having. We have a little money in the bank, a nice car, two Sunday suits and find ourselves humming the Peggy Lee song, "Is that all there is?"

That question really holds its own answer for those of us who subscribe to the truths of the Savior's message, but it does provide for us the strong hint that we need to expand our horizons and evaluate what Jesus described as the "thing thou lackest" (Mark 10:21). One of the exciting, yet frustrating, truths of life is that once we get beyond the basics of good citizenship in the home, church, hospital, and town square, that which we lack or should pursue

may be very different for each one of us. My circumstances and opportunities to grow and contribute are certainly different in some substantive ways than yours. Not better, not worse—only yours and mine—distinctive and individual.

Because part of the great challenge before us is to succeed, contribute, and grow, we each need to develop some standards by which to chart not only our directions but also our progress. Many of these measurements such as degrees, specialty certifications, awards, publications, temple recommends, sandbags stacked, children educated, parents cared for, and so forth, are external and properly so. However, we must never forget the importance and privilege that we may have of internal direction and confirmation of feelings that come from proper conduct and prioritization of our aspirations and values (Doctrine and Covenants 9:7-9). Also, all that we do must be within the confines of the standard set for those claiming discipleship of the greatest physician, Jesus Christ, when he asks, "What manner of men ought ye to be?" (3 Nephi 27:27).

Within the realm of our basic socialization, the promptings of the Holy Spirit become primary and vital because each of us has his own talents which differ quantitatively (Matthew 25:15) but also qualitatively (Doctrine and Covenants 46:11-12). Gratefully, I will not be judged based on Elder Russell Nelson's talents and, therefore, I should not judge myself by them. Soberly, I will have the opportunity to account for Cecil Samuelson's possibilities and, therefore, should keep careful and continuing account of how I am doing.

Assuming that we can agree on the above assertion, how do we wrestle with the multiple pressures, opportunities, frustrations, and potential conflicts we encounter in a productive, progressive way, and not become what Dr. Hal Cole so color-

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fully describes as our own private "guilt and shame committee!"? Let me share some notions that I find personally helpful.

We need to remember that most of us are a little like Naaman the leper who sought an audience with Elisha and was resistant to the little or routine things that ultimately are of the greatest importance (II Kings 5). The old parable of the tortoise and the hare should remind us that fits, dramatic starts, and big splashes that lead to unrealistic expectations of ourselves and impossible self-imposed requirements are never so successful as consistent, committed constancy in our pursuits.

The scriptures remind us that growth and development are gradual processes and not events (see Doctrine and Covenants 128:21 and 19:22) and that we should "not run faster or labor more than you have strength . . . but be diligent unto the end" (Doctrine and Covenants 10:4).

The Savior's counsel that we should "render unto Caesar" (Luke 20:25) allows us to allocate our time and resources to various efforts that can then be complementary, rather than competitive. Just as proper suc-

cess in our profession brings blessings to our families, involvements in our Church and communities builds in us greater sensitivity to the needs of our patients and families. Jim Mason's work at the CDC in Atlanta brings success not only to him and his family, but reflects in very positive ways for the Church and our country. We need to remember, however, that no one else has the unique constellation of responsibilities and opportunities that he has. Each does have his or her own, and they are usually much more significant and potentially exciting than any of us suspect.

I take great comfort from the injunction in Proverbs 3:5 that we should "trust in the Lord with all thine heart" but also understand the tremendous importance of our own clear, serious, and regular efforts to think through our problems and situations as President Hugh B. Brown always counseled so wisely.

For years I have been intrigued by an observation C.S. Lewis made many years ago when he described the curious things that happened to the men who devoted their lives to serving on crews of lifeboats off the coasts of England and concluded that "some things worth dying for are not worth living for."

Lastly, I am inspired by the direct, humble declaration of the Apostle Peter who, in response to one making a request based on real need, said, "Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee" (Acts 3:6). Each of us must learn and decide what it is that we have and then give it to the best of our ability, recognizing that the things that matter most cannot come from anyone else, but also understanding that each of us has limitations and is distinctive in what we can contribute.

I am confident that we can all find increased growth and satisfaction in the challenges and trials of increasing our loyalty and faithfulness to those things we hold most dear.