



# "Put Your Shoulder to the Wheel"

Elder Neal A. Maxwell

*Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles*

**Work is always a spiritual necessity even if, for some, work is not an economic necessity.**



Brethren, during my Aaronic Priesthood years I was a swineherd! Way back then, by means of a 4-H Club project involving purebred Duroc pigs, I became familiar with work! As proof that what follows is not merely swollen memory, may I, with Elder Nelson's help, display very briefly this blanket of nearly 100 ribbons won by my prize pigs at various fairs over several years.

Up near Elder Nelson's hand is a pink ribbon, won 60 years ago. It was the very first ribbon I ever won. I think the judge had a tender eye, and the pig wasn't really so choice, but he knew I needed encouragement and hence the fourth prize. The

purple ribbons were for champions that were exhibited later on!

Thank you, Elder Nelson.

Brethren, I learned the hard way about the need to watch shifting pork prices at the local meat-packing plant. Careful records of profits and losses were kept with the help of my bookkeeper father. As in all things, my parents, so supportive, even ended up doing some of the perspiring themselves, including a special mother born 95 years ago today. She showed me how to work, and she loved me enough to correct me.

In order to obtain low-cost pig feed, I regularly bought dozens and dozens of three-day-old loaves of bread at a bakery for a mere penny a loaf. Additionally, if present at the right time at a local dairy, I could get about 70 gallons of skim milk *free!* Now I pay \$2.50 a gallon--an amusing irony. By saving in these ways, I could buy the needed grain for the pigs with the little hard cash that I had.

There were many times when a pregnant sow would give birth to her litter after midnight. The resultant weariness of attending to all that, and more, was real. Yet through it all, there was a sense of some accomplishment, including contributing to our family menus. Most young men my age did similar work. Back then, brethren, we were all poor together, and we didn't know it. Work was a given. Today, for some, receiving is a given.

However, there were real social downsides to raising pigs. Already shy, I remember vividly the principal of the junior high school coming into my class once and saying aloud in front of everybody: "Neal, your mother just called. Your pigs are out!" I felt like crawling under my desk but instead ran home to help round up the pigs.

My father was loving but exacting. He noted that while I worked hard, my work was often not carefully done. I was a stranger to excellence. One summer day I determined to please Dad by putting in a number of needed fence posts, firmly implanted and fully aligned. I worked hard all that day and then scanned the lane expectantly down which my father would walk home. When he arrived, I watched anxiously as he carefully inspected the fence posts, even checking them with a level bar before pronouncing them to be fully satisfactory. Then came his praise. My sweat of the brow had earned Dad's commendation which, in turn, melted my heart.

Please forgive this brief autobiographical note, which I have used to express my deep appreciation for learning to work at an early age. Even so, brethren, I certainly did not always put my shoulder to the wheel with a "heart full of song," but I did learn about shoulders and wheels, which helped later in life, when the wheels grew larger. Some of today's otherwise good young men mistakenly think that putting their shoulders to the wheel is the same thing as putting their hands on a steering wheel!

Our Heavenly Father has described His vast plan for His children by saying, "Behold, this is my *work* and my glory--to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man" (Moses 1:39; emphasis added). Consider the significance of the Lord's use of the word *work*. What He is doing so lovingly and redemptively is, nevertheless, work--even for Him! We, likewise, speak of "working out our salvation," of the "law of the harvest," and of the "sweat of the brow" (see Moses 5:1; see also Inspired Version, Gen. 4:1). These are not idle phrases. Instead, they underscore the importance of work. In fact, brethren, work is always a spiritual necessity even if, for some, work is not an economic necessity.

Thus I speak to you as good young men, including seven fine grandsons listening tonight, among them two missionaries and three recently ordained deacons. I remind you that the gospel of work is part of "the fulness of the gospel." Though joyful, missionary work is work. Though joyful, temple work is work. Alas, a few of our underwhelmed youth work all right, but mostly at trying to please themselves.

Unfortunately, a few of our otherwise good youth are unstretched, having almost a free pass. Perks are provided, including cars complete with fuel and insurance--all paid for by parents who sometimes listen in vain for a few courteous and appreciative words.

Young men, your individual mix of work will vary, understandably, by season and circumstance as between the hours spent on *homework* and *family work* and *Church work*, *part-time work*, and *work on service projects*. Each form of work can stretch your talents. Nevertheless, watch for the warning lights. For instance, if you are engaged in *part-time work*, are all your wages spent on yourself? Is tithing paid? Is some saved for a mission? President Spencer W. Kimball gave us this crisp counsel: "[If the young man] is permitted to spend his all on himself, that spirit of selfishness may continue with him to his grave" (*The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball* [1982], 560).

*Homework* from school is surely a necessity, but does mental work squeeze out spiritual work entirely? Your grade-point average is very important, but what is your GPA for Christian service?

Doing *Church work* can develop vital reflexes, and the need for this form of work will never cease. But are you merely going through the motions?

*Family work* is vital too, but does it really go beyond merely keeping your own rooms clean and picking up your own clothes?

Whatever the mix of work, the hardest work you and I will ever do is to put off our selfishness. It is heavy lifting!

A balance of work needs to be orchestrated, because some forms of work tend to dominate other

forms, like fathers working late at the office too often. Our preferred chores need little encouragement just as in Elder Spencer Condie's paraphrase of Strauss's warning to orchestra conductors: "Never give an encouraging nod to the brass section, or you'll never hear the strings again!"

Be careful, fathers, when you inordinately desire things to be better for your children than they were for you. Do not, however unintentionally, make things worse by removing the requirement for reasonable work as part of their experience, thereby insulating your children from the very things that helped make you what you are!

Granted, some tactical situations have changed! For most young men, there are no cows to be milked, pigs to be fed, et cetera. Yes, some of today's work may seem artificial and contrived. Nevertheless, young men, be patient with your parents as they try to help provide reasonable and meaningful work. In that connection, how blessed we would be if more sons could work alongside their fathers, if only occasionally. Fathers and sons, if such teaming up is not already happening at all, please, in the next three months, select just one, stretching chore to do together.

Young men, I do not know what your individual gifts are, but you have them! Please employ these gifts and stretch your talents--along with taking out garbage cans, mowing lawns, raking leaves, or shoveling snow for widows, widowers, or a sick neighbor.

Knowing how to work will give you an edge in life, and experience with excellence--a special edge!

Let us all be quick and generous to praise our youth for the work they accomplish, especially when they do it well!

The rising generation will determine if Latter-day Saints will continue to be known for the work ethic. Long ago, President Brigham Young advised: "I want to see our Elders so full of integrity that [their work] will be preferred. . . . If we live our religion and are worthy [of] the name . . . Latter-day Saints, we are just the men that all such business can be entrusted to with perfect safety; if it can not [be] it will prove that we do not live our religion" (*Discourses of Brigham Young* [1954], 23233).

When the time comes, young men, make your career choices. Know that whether one is a neurosurgeon, forest ranger, mechanic, farmer, or teacher is a matter of preference not of principle. While those career choices are clearly very important, these do not mark your real career path. Instead, brethren, you are sojourning sons of God who have been invited to take the path that leads home. There, morticians will find theirs is not the only occupation to become obsolete. But the capacity to work and work wisely will never become obsolete. And neither will the ability to learn. Meanwhile, my young brethren, I have not seen any perspiration-free shortcuts to the celestial kingdom; there is no easy escalator to take us there.

Now, whether holders of the Aaronic or the Melchizedek Priesthood, at no time has it been more important for you to know *who* you are than in today's world. For a long, long time, each of you has been part of a great and ongoing drama. You were actually with God in the beginning (see D&C 93:29). You were at the grand, premortal council when, as His spirit sons, you shouted for joy over the prospect of this mortal experience in furtherance of Heavenly Father's plan of salvation.

Further drama lies ahead for the faithful, including one day when every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is the Christ, and when all will acknowledge that God is God, and that He is perfect in His justice and mercy (see Mosiah 27:31; 16:1; Alma 12:15). Those who love the Lord will inherit His celestial kingdom, where eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, such things as the Lord hath prepared for them (see 1 Cor. 2:9). Jesus has already worked to prepare such a glorious place for us.

My brethren, old and young, *sweeping* is the only way to describe your spiritual history and your possible future! There will always be plenty of work to do, especially for those who know how to do the Lord's work! I gladly endorse what President Hinckley has declared, namely that "we have the finest generation of young people ever in the history of this Church" (*Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley* [1997], 714; see also Conference Report, Apr. 1992, 96; or ENSIGN, May 1992, 69).

I believe in your future possibilities. You are special spirits sent to do special chores. It is toward those chores that I have tried to give you a friendly nudge tonight!

I love you! May God bless you and keep you on that path that will take you home is my prayer in the holy name of Jesus Christ, amen!

[◀ Previous](#) | [Next ▶](#)

© 2007 Intellectual Reserve, Inc. All rights reserved. [Rights and use information.](#) [Privacy policy](#)