

Recreation, and the Proper Use of It

A Speech by President Brigham Young, Delivered at the Legislative Festival Held in the Territorial House, Great Salt Lake City, March 4, 1852.

With joy and delight I look upon you, brethren and sisters. I feel to render all praise, thanks, and adoration to our Father and God, that my heart is capable of rendering; and with all the affections, together with all the talent bestowed upon me, I feel to serve, praise, adore, and acknowledge the Lord our God.

Let me ask a question. Finding ourselves in our present position in the world of sin and darkness, of ignorance, unbelief, superstition, and tradition, which have been woven and interwoven with our lives; thrown around us like a mantle, which is used to shield the body from the cold and from the storm; considering ourselves as we are, then ask ourselves the question, if on earth we have any idea of anything like a kingdom or community of people being celestial; then ask ourselves again, if we have, does not the presentation this evening border very nigh to it? I can say for one, as far as we do know and understand, as far as our capacities can expand, and grasp life and happiness, just so far this community which is present this evening, is advanced in the celestial path.

If there is a heart here this evening, that does not chime in with every sentiment of righteousness, that heart has no power in this assembly. This company are controllable, like the ship by the rudder, in a gentle breeze, that can be turned hither and thither at the will and pleasure of him who commands; so with all here present; at the sound of the voice, all is hushed, and every heart throbs in unison in response to the words of praise and thanksgiving to our Father and our God. This proves that the majority, at least, are right; and I have no reason to believe that there is a heart in this house, but chimes in with my own. Every countenance is cheerful; every face is lit up with a lively glow of joy, peace, and tranquility.

We are now enjoying our pastimes. We often meet together and worship the Lord by singing, praying, and preaching, fasting, and communing with each other in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Now we are met in the capacity of a social community—for what? That our minds may rest, and our bodies receive that recreation which is proper and necessary to keep up an equilibrium, to promote healthy action to the whole system.

Let our minds sing for joy, and let life diffuse itself into every avenue of the body; for the object of our meeting is for its exercise, for its good.

This party was gotten up by the members of the Legislature, to rest their minds, to convene in a social capacity, and enjoy the society of each other, with their families, and to give renewed activity and energy, which will invigorate and strengthen them in the discharge of the arduous duties devolving upon them.

With regard to these feelings prevailing in our midst this evening, as well as the correctness of these principles, all men and women must be their own judge. I judge for myself, and not for another, although I have that privilege, and can do it with safety and propriety. Why is this? Because when I look upon the faces of my brethren, I know their hearts; let the roots of bitterness be there, and their countenances meet mine, and I know it in a moment. Do you not know it also? Can you not feel it? Can you not see it? You can. This is why I say that I have the privilege of judging others. You have the same privilege. Having this privilege to judge for others as well as myself, I feel to say, that every heart of the company present this afternoon and evening, feels to sing praises to the Lord, and shout hallelujah to His holy name. I am in the best place I ever was during my life, and with the best society. I never saw a community that enjoyed the tranquility and peace that are enjoyed by this people in these valleys of the mountains. Is it not so? Judge for yourselves, ye are my witnesses.

A few words, perhaps, will suffice the company. I was requested to make a few remarks at the opening of the meeting, but I chose to delay speaking until a more suitable time; for when any of my brethren or myself speak to the people, I wish all to hear that conveniently can, because when we are in this capacity, and call our minds together, it is to reflect for a few moments, and look at each other, and think of the Lord; view over the past times of our lives, and contrast their history with the present festive moments. It is good to look upon each other, because the faces of our friends, and the gladness of their countenances, cheer our hearts, furnishing food for

future reflection. Under all circumstances, in every situation of our past lives, in every transaction of business and of social enjoyment, remember it is good to reflect and consider upon it now in the days of peace and prosperity, while we have the privilege.

Our present situation, and the enjoyments of this evening, will become subjects of pleasant and agreeable reflection, when we shall be separated from each other. Some of these, my brethren, may be absent in foreign lands; our sisters may be separated from this community, and go to the right and to the left; then these moments of festive joy will be remembered with pleasing emotions, and cherished in fond memory in after years.

Again, when we meet in this capacity, it is good for our minds to be refreshed on this wise a little, for the reason, as you are all aware, that we are naturally forgetful, and it is according to the frailties of human nature to decline and falter in our feelings at the varied, besetting, enticing, and almost overwhelming temptations that are abroad in the world, and with which the people, especially those of the household of faith, have to contend. Our former life, its anxieties and enjoyments, are apt to be forgotten. This is our experience. If we should suffer ourselves to spend our time day after day, and week after week, as we are today, how long would it be, before we would forget the Lord? It would not be long. If we continued in the exercising of the body without reflection, this company would soon think—it is no matter about praying, or asking the Lord about anything; we have enjoyed ourselves heretofore, and all has been peace, quietness, and good order. But how long would it remain so? How long would it be before we would become careless, if we remembered not the Lord? For this reason, I say, on every such occasion, it is right, reasonable, and necessary, that every heart be directed to the Lord. When we have had sufficient recreation for our good, let that suffice. It is all right; then let our minds labor instead of our bodies; and in all our exercises of body and mind, it is good to remember the Lord. If it cannot be so, but otherwise, I do not wish to see another party while I live. If I could not enjoy the Spirit of the Lord in this capacity with you this evening, and feel the power of God to rest upon me, I should cease from all such indulgence. From this time, never let us permit ourselves to go one step beyond that which the Lord will own and bless.

But I pause here, and for this reason—I want it distinctly understood, that fiddling and dancing are no part of our worship. The question may be asked, What are they for, then? I answer, that my body may keep pace with my mind. My mind labors like a man logging, all the time; and this is the reason why I am fond of these pastimes—they give me a privilege to throw everything off, and shake myself, that my body may exercise, and my mind rest. What for? To get strength, and be renewed and quickened, and enlivened, and animated, so that my mind may not wear out. Experience tells us that the most of the inhabitants of the earth wear out their bodies without wearing their minds at all, through the sufferings they endure from hard labor, with distress, poverty, and want. While on the other hand, a great portion of mankind wear out their bodies without laboring, only in anxiety. But when men are brought to labor entirely in the field of intelligence, there are few minds to be found possessing strength enough to bear all things; the mind becomes overcharged, and when this is the case, it begins to wear upon the body, which will sink for want of the proper exercises. This is the reason why I believe in and practice what I do. The question might be asked, Why not go into the canyons and get out wood, which would be good exercise enough? If you would know, come up to my house, you will soon find out. Were I to go to the canyons, the whole camp of Israel would follow me there; and they would not be there long before they would say, Come, brother Brigham, I want to talk with you; come, I will chop this wood. How many scores of times I have undertaken to work, since I came into this ministry! Scores and hundreds of times when my calling in the kingdom of God was less than it is now, have I endeavored to set myself to work, but seldom could have a chance to do so more than five minutes; someone would come along, “Give me the hoe, brother Brigham, I want to talk with you;” and so stop me, and no sooner stop me than he stops also. I have given it up, I do not intend to work any more at manual labor. I do not wrestle, or play the ball; all the exercise I do get is to dance a little, while my council room is from my office to this room, and from this room to my house again, into my sitting room, dining room, &c.

You will see the time, you will know what my labor is. I wish this community to consider that I have feelings of a very acute nature. There is not a man or a woman, Saint or sinner, it mattereth not, that feels injured, and lays his or her complaints before me; but what it rests upon my feelings; but my faith is unyielding, and I intend to keep it so, as much as I can; my feelings sympathize so with the injured, that I am grieved and distressed, and my head

aches, and large drops of cold sweat sit upon my brow, and no man or woman knows anything about my feelings, and I do not want them to know, for I calculate to kick off from my heels all that I cannot carry. I will carry all I should, but there is not a person in this community that can bring to mind or mention the time whenever I exhibited one particle of sorrow or trouble to them. I calculate to carry my own sorrows just as long as I live upon this earth; and when I go to the grave, I expect them all to go there, and sleep with me in eternal silence.

But to return to our party. I would just say, it was gotten up by the Legislature to enjoy ourselves. I have enjoyed myself first-rate: my heart is cheerful and full of gladness. I am in the midst of the Saints of the Most High, and my desire is, and I will say with all my heart, may God grant that the blessings, favors, and mercies, and kindness of our Father in heaven, may bring us to a sense of the obligations we owe to Him; and cheer, and cause joy and tranquility to reign in this community, that every heart may be bound up in the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, without having to feel the rod again. What is the use of it, when mercy and kindness are lavished upon the people of God, and to see them falter in their faith, see them grow cold towards the Lord their God, see them slacken their pace? Is it not grievous? Just look at it. Suppose you had all the good gifts to bestow upon your children that heart could wish, and you lavish them out, but the more you give, the more slothful they become—how would you feel? Just apply this to yourselves: I know how I should feel. When I bring my mind to bear upon this subject, and see what the Lord has done for me, and for this people, and think that I should become remiss in my duty, so that the Lord should have need to chasten me again, it seems, on the first reflection, that I ought to be damned. When I look at myself before the Lord, and see what He has called me to, and what He has called my brethren and sisters to; how He has bestowed blessings upon us, and heaped them up until there is not room to receive them, and I should want to go to the gold mines, and return again here to speculate upon the Saints, and should be guilty of complaining all the time, it seems, if I were to do this, the Lord would damn me.

I know you feel as I do upon this subject. When you take this into consideration, your serious reflections having place in your heart, you feel as I do. For heaven's sake, for your own sake, and for the sake of Him who died for us, never let us falter in our duty. While we live, it is our duty to love the Lord with all our might, and with all our strength, and with all our souls. This is our duty first and foremost: we ought to love Him better than our wives, children, and brethren and sisters, and all things besides. Is this our duty? Verily yes. Let the heart love God, and serve Him, without any division of feeling: never suffer it to wander to the right or to the left for one moment.

If these were the feelings of this people, the Lord would lift up our hands, exalt our hearts, and cause us to walk in His almighty strength, so that the devil and his imps would never have power to bring another affliction upon us, never, no, never. Therefore, love the Lord, keep His commandments, cleave to the Israel of God; this is my exhortation all the time. And what is the next duty? Love your neighbor as yourself, do unto others as you would that others should do unto you, cease your contention and bad feelings, your evil speaking and evil doing.

As I observed here not long since, I consider it is a disgrace to the community, and in the eyes of the Lord, and of Angels, and in the eyes of all the Prophets and Revelators that have ever lived upon the earth, when a community will descend to the low, degraded state of contention with each other; this little bickering, jarring, faultfinding, somebody's abused me; why do you not say, if you have a mind to abuse, abuse away? Suppose every heart should say, if my neighbor does wrong to me, I will not complain, the Lord will take care of him. Let every heart be firm, and everyone say, I will never contend any more with a man for property, I will not be cruel to my fellow creature, but I will do all the good I can, and as little evil as possible. Now, where would be the wrong of taking this course? This is the way to approximate toward a celestial state. A community cannot be produced upon all the face of the earth that presents a celestial aspect like this. If we continue to be faithful and prayerful, and strive continually to resist every evil, we shall approximate more and more towards that celestial kingdom, where there is an eternal inheritance, and an unsullied glory. And if we should look back upon ourselves, when we were doing evil to each other, should we not do so with regret and shame? Should we not look upon our past mortal lives with anguish and disgust? I wish men would look upon that eternity which is before them. In the great morning of the resurrection, with what grief would they look upon their little trifling affairs of this probation; they would say, O! do not mention it, for it is a source of mortification to me to think that I ever should be guilty of doing wrong, or of neglecting to do good to my fellow men, even if they have abused me. O! how would it appear if you understood

the heart of the Lord, and understood the heart and faithfulness of those in the celestial kingdom. As good as we are, we shall not want to look upon our past actions; we shall say, O! do not mention it, but let it sleep; I never want that to be resurrected, but let it die in the grave, and sleep an eternal sleep. Brethren and sisters, I hope and pray that our evils may never rise with us. I can say to you, with all my heart, and with all my soul, and not only to this company, but to all the Saints throughout the world—may the heavens bless you; the Lord Almighty blesses you, my soul blesses you, how my soul loves you, may angels bless you, guard and preserve you; and may all the heavenly hosts, arrayed in all their panoply of power, be engaged for your exaltation.

One thing more. You will perceive all the time, this one thing in me, viz., by my conduct, there is no lack of confidence—not a particle of jealousy arises in my bosom towards this people. I never felt for one moment a shadow of doubt upon that subject. I have never seen one moment but this people loved me; although I may get up here and cuff them about, chastising them for their forgetfulness, their weaknesses and follies, yet I have not seen a moment when they did not love me. The reason is, because I love them so well. Do you not know that spirits beget spirits, and likeness begets likeness. I love this people so well that I know they love me; they have confidence in me, because I have confidence in them. You may scan the history of the whole Church, and look over the whole surface of the matter, and did you ever see this people, when they had the same confidence as they have in each other at this day? No, never. And it is on the increase; and this is what will make a community powerful. But if we lack confidence in each other, and be jealous of each other, our peace will be destroyed. If we cultivate the principle of unshaken confidence in each other, our joy will be full. What does it prove? It proves that we are fast advancing and approximating towards that degree of light, knowledge, and glory, and all the principles that pertain to the everlasting Gospel, and that we are actually in the favor of the Lord. We need not bring any proofs of that, for that devils never kick and cuff their own is certain. As I used to say, fifteen years ago, when I was out preaching, and the people would get alarmed, when the devil would get mad, and would say to me, “Oh! dear, sir, what is the matter, I am afraid we are all going to be killed, for all hell is boiling over”—my answer was, “Thank God, the devil has not forsaken us yet.” Will he not sustain his own kingdom? When you see all the powers of the evil one combined against a community, you may know that is Christ’s kingdom. Everything has proved that this is God’s kingdom, and I need not say anything more about these two powers.

The Lord Almighty is for us, and the devil is against us. However, I will tell you what I think of the whole of the devil’s company on this earth—if they will just keep out of my path, I shall be glad, for I never want to see one of them. My soul is satisfied with looking upon this wicked world. If I never see another wicked person while I live, I am perfectly satisfied with the Saints; these are my feelings. True, it is my duty to preach to them; but I am willing, if the Lord is satisfied, that I should never see another wicked person upon this earth. I would be satisfied to live with the Saints and Angels from this time henceforth. May heaven bless you, brethren and sisters. Amen.