

Elder Neal A. Maxwell

Being stretched by a merciful Lord

Brethren, please allow me to reminisce informally and gratefully. Hopefully this will be done in a relaxed, almost conversational way by citing a few remembrances, a few of life's little lessons—nothing spectacular. There will also be several one-liners whose durability reflects their brevity. The focus of these remembrances is upon being stretched by a merciful Lord (see Moroni 10:3).

If just one of these remembrances can be “likened” unto yourselves (see 1 Nephi 19:23), there might be a brief father and son discussion later on.

Training of youth

Let's go back 60 years. The minutes of the Wandamere Ward of the Grant Stake for June 4, 1944, indicate the sacrament was administered by my friends Ward Jackson, Arthur Hicks, and me to a congregation of 141. Then it was off to war. In May of 1945, I was blessing the sacrament again—but in a foxhole on Okinawa for a congregation of only one—myself!

The training of my youth took over without fanfare—something only partially appreciated by me then—including abstaining from coffee in those same circumstances when water was scarce and highly chlorinated.

I do not know what lies ahead of you young men, but my advice would be to fasten your seat belts and hold on firmly to your principles!

In my Primary days we sang “‘Give,’ Said the Little Stream” (*Children's Songbook*, 236)—certainly sweet and motivating but not exactly theologically drenched. Today's children, as you know, sing the more spiritually focused “I'm Trying to Be like Jesus” (*Children's Songbook*, 78–79).

Back then, in family, neighborhood, ward, and school life, we were all poor together, but we didn't know it. We made room for each other to grow, to make dumb mistakes, to repent, and to begin to develop at least some spiritual reflexes. Today some anxious parents seem to insist on constantly pulling up the daisies to see how the roots are doing.

Examples and influences

Young or old, my priesthood brothers, be grateful for people in your lives who love you enough to correct you, to remind you of your standards and possibilities, even when you don't want to be reminded.

A dear and now deceased friend said to me years ago when I had said something sardonic, “You could have gone all day without saying that.” His one-liner reproof was lovingly stated, illustrating how correction can be an act of affection.

When loved ones exemplify, it is especially memorable. My sister Lois, legally blind from birth, not only coped but served well as a public schoolteacher for 33 years. She had that same reflex possessed by those pioneer souls who quietly picked up their handcars and headed west—a reflex we all need. So if various trials are allotted to you, partake of life's bitter cups, but without becoming bitter.

Soon after arriving home from World War II, I had “promises to keep” (Robert Frost, “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening”)—meaning going on a mission *now*. I grew tired of waiting for the bishop. And in some early ark-steadying, I went to the bishop's home and said I had saved the money and wanted to go, so let's “get this show on the road.” The good bishop hesitated and then said he'd been meaning to ask me about going.

Years later I would learn from that bishop's devoted ward clerk that the bishop had felt I needed a little more time with my family after having been away so far and for a tenth of my life. Hearing this, I chastised myself for having been too judgmental. (See Bruce C. Hafen, *A Disciple's Life: The Biography of Neal A. Maxwell* [2002], 129–30.)

No wonder the wise father of Elder Henry B. Eyring observed once how the Lord had a perfect Church until He let all of us inside!

Teaching children with wisdom

Two relevant memories for young fathers. When I was such, I had just received a phone call telling me of a friend's death in an accident. I was sitting in the living room with tears streaking down my cheeks. Our young son, Cory, saw the tears as he passed in the hallway. I learned that he had anxiously assumed the tears were because he had disappointed me in some way. He didn't know about the phone call. Brethren, we underestimate how genuinely and frequently our children want to please us.

Having virtually no quantitative skills, I was seldom if ever able to help our children with math and scientific subjects. One day our high school daughter Nancy asked me for "a little help" regarding a Supreme Court case, *Fletcher v. Peck*. I was so eager to help after so many times of not being able to help. At last a chance to unload! Out came what I knew about *Fletcher v. Peck*. Finally my frustrated daughter said, "Dad, I need only a little help!" I was meeting my own needs rather than giving her "a little help."

We worship a Lord who teaches us precept by precept, brethren, so even when we are teaching our children the gospel, let's not dump the whole load of hay.

Press forward in the gospel

In later years I saw a few leave the Church who could then never leave it alone. They used often their intellectual reservations to cover their behavioral lapses (see Neal A. Maxwell, *All These Things Shall Give Thee Experience* [1979], 110). You will see some of that. By the way, do not expect the world's solutions to the world's problems to be very effective. Such solutions often resemble what C. S. Lewis wrote about those who go dashing back and forth with fire extinguishers in times of flood (see *The Screwtape Letters* [1959], 117–18). Only the gospel is constantly relevant, and the substitute things won't work.

Once when traveling with Elder and Sister Russell M. Nelson, we left our hotel in Bombay, India, to catch a plane for Karachi, Pakistan, and then on to Islamabad. When we got to the chaotic airport, our flight had been canceled. Impatiently, I said to the man at the airline counter, "What do you expect us to do, just give up and go back to the hotel?" He said with great dignity, "Sir, you never go back to the hotel." We rummaged about the airport, found a flight, kept the appointment in Islamabad, and even had a night's sleep. Sometimes life is like that: we are left to press forward and endure frustrated expectations—refusing to "go back to the hotel"! Otherwise, such "give-up-itis" will affect all seasons of life. Besides, the Lord knows how many miles we have to go "before [we] sleep"! ("Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening").

Learning from family

In 1956, after returning home from several years in Washington, D.C., and having declined several attractive offers there, I received an offer to work at the University of Utah. My wife said I should

take it. She said presciently, “I feel if you go there, maybe you will have some influence on students.” I replied impatiently, “I’ll be typing news releases, not working with students.” The subsequent opportunities included being a bishop of a student ward, dean of students, and teaching hundreds of fine students in political science. It wasn’t status that mattered, of course, but being stretched and being given opportunities to serve.

Our wives are often inspired but sometimes in counterintuitive ways—a reality, young men, which your fathers may be brave enough to explain to you sometime.

It’s interesting, too, how we create, cumulatively, expectations in the lives of our grandchildren even when we are not aware of it. Some years ago, when our grandson Robbie was about five, we dropped by to see his family in Orem. He was asleep upstairs, and his mother called, “Robbie, Grandpa Neal is here!” A tired little voice floated downstairs saying, “Shall I bring my scriptures?”

Of course he was too young to read them, but he carried them, as so many do in the Church today in that fine new pattern!

Brethren, there are clusters of memories embedded in each of your lives. And these can help us to “remember how merciful the Lord hath been” (Moroni 10:3). He certainly has been to me!

Submitting our wills to God

Brethren, as you submit your wills to God, you are giving Him the *only* thing you *can* actually give Him that is really yours to give. Don’t wait too long to find the altar or to begin to place the gift of your wills upon it! No need to wait for a receipt; the Lord has His own special ways of acknowledging.

I testify to you that God has known you individually, brethren, for a long, long time (see D&C 93:23). He has loved you for a long, long time. He not only knows the names of all the stars (see Psalm 147:4; Isaiah 40:26), He knows your names and all your heartaches and your joys! By the way, you have never seen an immortal star; they finally expire. But seated by you tonight are immortal individuals—imperfect but who are, nevertheless, “trying to be like Jesus”! In His name, even Jesus Christ, amen.

Elder Mervyn B. Arnold

A persistent leader activates a young man

Brother José de Souza Marques was the type of leader who truly understood the principle taught by the Savior: “And if any man among you be strong in the Spirit, let him take with him him that is weak, that he may be edified in all meekness, that he may become strong also” (D&C 84:106).

As a member of the branch presidency in Fortaleza, Brazil, Brother Marques, with the other priesthood leaders, developed a plan to reactivate those who were less active in his branch. One of those

who was less active was a young man by the name of Fernando Araujo. Recently I spoke to Fernando, and he told me of his experience:

“I became involved in surfing competitions on Sunday mornings and stopped going to my Church meetings. One Sunday morning, Brother Marques knocked on my door and asked my nonmember mother if he could talk to me. When she told him I was sleeping, he asked permission to wake me. He said to me, ‘Fernando, you are late for church!’ Not listening to my excuses, he took me to church.