

Elder Neal A. Maxwell

With all of you, I express my admiration to these wonderful men who are being released and whose status is being adjusted. They were exemplary at the time of their calls; they are even more so today. They are portable sermons for us all. My sermon was essentially prepared in June. It is for myself as well as for the members of the Church.

Murmuring against the Lord

Murmuring is defined as a half-suppressed resentment or muttered complaint. We all remember, in *Fiddler on the Roof*, Tevye's verbal asides to God.

However, just as "a yawn [can be] a silent shout," so murmuring can be much more than muted muttering (G. K. Chesterton, in Robert Andrews, ed., *The Concise Columbia Dictionary of Quotations* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1987], p. 30). The real "Addressee" of some of our murmuring is clearly the Lord, as when the people complained against Moses (see Exodus 16:8; 1 Nephi 16:20). At least Tevye honestly acknowledged whom he addressed.

Scriptural accounts of murmuring

Murmuring seems to come so naturally to the natural man. It crosses the scriptural spectrum of recorded complaints. We need bread. We need water (see Numbers 21:5). The needed military reinforcements did not arrive (see Alma 60). "Why did we ever leave Egypt?" (see Numbers 11:20). "Why did we ever leave Jerusalem?" (see 1 Nephi 2:11). Some, perhaps understandably, murmured over persecution by unbelievers, and others even murmured over what the name of Christ's church should be (see Mosiah 27:1; 3 Nephi 27:3-4). Most ironically, the coming forth of more scripture from God was to cause murmuring (see 2 Nephi 29:8).

An early scriptural instance of murmuring involved Cain's offering to the

Lord, illustrating how our intentions are at least as important as our deeds (see Moses 5:20-21). Cain was "wroth" that Abel's offering was acceptable but not his. Sometimes, brothers and sisters, we, too, worry if someone else seems to be more favored than we. Worse still, we want to be accepted of the Lord — but on our terms, not His!

A basic cause of murmuring is that too many of us seem to expect that life will flow ever smoothly, featuring an unbroken chain of green lights with empty parking places just in front of our destinations!

In its extremity, murmuring reflects not only the feelings of the discontented, but also the feelings of the very conflicted:

"Their sorrowing was . . . the sorrowing of the damned, because [they could not] take happiness in sin.

"And [yet] they did not come unto Jesus with broken hearts and contrite spirits, but they did curse God, and wish to die. Nevertheless they would struggle with the sword for their lives" (Mormon 2:13-14).

In His parable of the vineyard workers, Jesus noted of disciples how those who worked from the first hour, having "borne the burden and heat of the day" (Matthew 20:12), murmured because they received the same wages as those who worked only the last hour (see 20:11). We beggars are so concerned with our entitlements.

Laman and Lemuel murmured against father Lehi for leading them into the wilderness because of the "foolish imaginations of his heart" (1 Nephi 2:11; see also 3:31; 4:4). This same depressing duo declared that father Lehi had judged the Jerusalemites too harshly, yet Jerusalem was soon to fall.

Lehi rebuked murmuring Laman and Lemuel for complaining over Nephi's saying "hard things" to them (1 Nephi 16:3). Lehi noted, "That which ye call anger was the truth" (2 Nephi 1:26). How often you and I, brothers and sisters,

can make that same mistake! Cutting truth does hurt, but its lancing can drain off pride.

There was murmuring, too, because Nephi broke his steel bow and couldn't build a ship (see 1 Nephi 17:17) and because he was seen as trying to "rule over us" (2 Nephi 5:3). Those same murmurers, however, soon forfeited themselves on the meat brought back by Nephi's new bow, and they sailed in the ship that Nephi built. How handy inspired but imperfect leaders in the Church are as focal points for our frustrations, especially if circumstances require them to suffer in silence! Having confidence in leaders who keep confidences is part of sustaining them.

Oliver Cowdery fell short of the coveted privilege of translating. He was told, "Do not murmur, my son, for it is wisdom in me that I have dealt with you after this manner" (D&C 9:6). Emma Smith was likewise told to "murmur not" that certain things were withheld from her (D&C 25:4).

The nature of murmurers

In pondering these and various other examples of murmuring, several other things become obvious.

First, the murmurer often lacks the courage to express openly his concerns. If the complaint concerns a peer, the murmurer seldom follows Jesus' counsel, "Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother" (Matthew 18:15).

Second, murmurers make good conversational cloak holders. Though picking up no stones themselves, they provoke others to do so.

Third, while a murmurer insists on venting his own feelings, he regards any response thereto as hostile (see 2 Nephi 1:26). Furthermore, murmurers seldom take into account the bearing capacity of their audiences.

Fourth, murmurers have short memories. Israel arrived in Sinai, then jour-

neyed on to the Holy Land though they were sometimes hungry and thirsty. But the Lord rescued them, whether by the miraculous appearance by quail or by water struck from a rock (see Numbers 11:31; Exodus 17:6). Strange, isn't it, brothers and sisters, how those with the shortest memories have the longest lists of demands! However, with no remembrance of past blessings, there is no perspective about what is really going on.

This powerful verse in the Old Testament reminds us of what is really going on:

"And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no" (Deuteronomy 8:2).

Perspective makes such an enormous and constant difference in our lives. It shouldn't surprise us, therefore, that Satan, we are told, does not know the mind of God (see Moses 4:6).

Perhaps when we murmur we are unconsciously complaining over not being able to cut a special deal with the Lord. We want full blessings but without full obedience to the laws on which those blessings are predicated. For instance, some murmurers seem to hope to reshape the Church to their liking by virtue of their murmuring. But why would one want to belong to a church that he could remake in his own image, when it is the Lord's image that we should come to have in our countenances? (see Alma 5:19).

The doctrines are His, brothers and sisters, not ours. The power is His to delegate, not ours to manipulate!

One especially fundamental fact about murmuring is contained in this verse: "And thus Laman and Lemuel . . . did murmur because they knew not the dealings of that God who had created them" (1 Nephi 2:12).

Like Laman and Lemuel, we too sometimes fail to understand the dealings of our God in our lives and in our times (see 1 Nephi 2:12; 17:22).

Thomas B. Marsh's murmuring

Presidents Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball tried to discourage Thomas B. Marsh's murmuring, but to no avail. A repentant Brother Marsh later said of that time:

"I must have lost the Spirit of the Lord out of my heart. . . .

"I became jealous of the Prophet . . . and overlooked everything that was right, and spent all my time in looking for the evil; . . . I thought I saw a beam in Brother Joseph's eye, but it was nothing but a mote, and my own eye was filled with the beam; . . . I got mad and I wanted everybody else to be mad, I talked with Brother Brigham Young and Brother Heber C. Kimball, and I wanted them to be mad like myself; and I saw they were not mad, and I got madder still because they were not. Brother Brigham Young, with a cautious look, said, 'Are you the leader of the Church, Brother Thomas?' I answered 'No.' 'Well then,' said he, 'why do you not let that alone?'" (in Joseph E. Cardon and Samuel O. Bennion, comps., *Testimonies of the Divinity of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints by Its Leaders* [Independence, Mo.: Zion's Printing and Publishing Co., 1930], pp. 103, 105).

The faithful do not murmur

Laborers in the Lord's vineyard who murmur over life's inequities, declared Jesus, murmur "against the goodman of the house" (Matthew 20:11). The goodness of the Lord is attested to in so many ways — mansions await! — yet we ungrateful guests still complain about the present accommodations.

Those of deep faith do not murmur. They are generously disposed, and they are reluctant to murmur, even while in deep difficulties, as with one faithful group, who said:

"Behold, [perhaps] ye are unsuccessful . . . ; if so, we do not desire to murmur. . . .

". . . It mattereth not — we trust God will deliver us, notwithstanding the weakness of our armies" (Alma 58:35, 37).

Exemplary Job, who went through so very much, was openly anxious that he not charge God foolishly (see Job 1:22).

The pleading of one filled with faith who is also concerned with the welfare of others, as with Joseph Smith in Liberty Jail, is not murmuring. This is not the murmuring of a superficial follower who is quick to complain and who is slow to endure. Reassurance and further instruction followed with Joseph being told, "My son, peace be unto thy soul; thine adversity and thine afflictions shall be but a small moment" (D&C 121:7).

Damage to ourselves is sufficient reason to resist murmuring, but another obvious danger is its contagiousness. Even faithful father Lehi, for one brief moment, got caught up in the contagion of murmuring (see 1 Nephi 16:20). Similarly, when Moses lapsed, very briefly, it was under exasperating pressure from rebels (see Numbers 20:7–12). No one knows how to work a crowd better than the adversary.

Be of good cheer

Instead of murmuring, therefore, being of good cheer is what is needed, and being of good cheer is equally contagious. We have clear obligations to so strengthen each other by doing things "with cheerful hearts and countenances" (D&C 59:15; see also 81:5).

Basic things over which the scriptures say we are to be of good cheer include the transcending blessing that our sins can be forgiven and that Jesus has overcome the world! These are marvelous blessings. Additionally, we are assured that the Lord is in our midst. He will lead us along. He will stand by us (see Matthew 9:2; John 16:33; D&C 61:36; 68:6; 78:18). By knowing that these everlasting things are firmly in place, can we not, then, better endure irritations, such as a dislocated travel schedule? Besides, brothers and sisters, how can it rain on the just and the unjust alike without occasionally raining on our personal parade? (see Matthew 5:45).

Ways to express legitimate concerns

Of course there are ways provided — formal and informal — for expressing legitimate concerns and complaints, and for doing so productively. These avenues often go unused, especially if one's real desire is to parade his discontent. Letting off steam always produces more heat than light (see Matthew 18:15). True, we may merely gripe or grumble in a passing way. We may even do it cleverly. Still, even mild murmuring can be more pointed than we may care to admit.

Murmuring is a form of mocking

Some actually question God's capacity, this in the face of His assurance to us, "I am able to do my own work" (2 Nephi 27:20, 21). Therefore, murmuring can be another form of mocking God's plan of salvation (see 3 Nephi 29:6). Yes, such individuals say, God has an overall general plan, but we don't care for His specific timing (see 2 Nephi 27:21; Enos 1:16; Ether 3:24, 27). Yet the scriptures specifically advise us that "all things must come to pass in their time" (D&C 64:32; see also 24:16).

Yes, such individuals may acknowledge God, but they criticize His ways (see Jacob 4:8; D&C 1:16; 56:14). We want things to be done in our ways, even though our ways are much lower ways (see Isaiah 55:8-9).

The importance of patience

Furthermore, since God has told us He intends to try our faith and our patience, are not situations of stress the very settings from which such murmuring would emerge? (see Mosiah 23:21). Of course — unless we are careful.

God accomplishes things, brothers and sisters, "in process of time." This calls for our patience. Moreover, doing things in process of time is often His way of either preserving our agency or of providing us with needed opportunity. In

fact, certain experiences, over which we might understandably murmur, can actually be for our good (see D&C 105:10; 122:7; Genesis 30:27). Thus you and I may think God is merely marking time, when He is actually marking openings for us, openings which are sorely needed. Even then, we are so slow to use those openings in order to escape from the familiar cell of selfishness.

Murmuring deafens and blinds us

Murmuring can also be noisy enough that it drowns out the various spiritual signals to us, signals which tell us in some cases to quit soaking ourselves indulgently in the hot tubs of self-pity! Murmuring over the weight of our crosses not only takes energy otherwise needed to carry them but might cause another to put down his cross altogether. Besides, brothers and sisters, if we were not carrying so much else, our crosses would be much lighter. The heaviest load we feel is often from the weight of our unkept promises and our unresolved sins, which press down relentlessly upon us. In any genuine surrendering to God, one says, "I will give away all my sins to know thee" (Alma 22:18). To Whom shall we give our sins? Only Jesus is both willing and able to take them!

Finally, nonmurmurers are permitted to see so much more. Ancient Israel was once compassed about with "a great host" of hostile horses and chariots. Elisha counseled his anxious young servant, "Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them" (2 Kings 6:16). The prophet then prayed that the Lord would "open" the young man's eyes, "and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha!" (2 Kings 6:17).

Elisha's counsel can help Church members today to silence our murmuring. Regardless of how things seem, or come to seem, in troubled times, "They that be with us are more than they that be with

them." My brothers and sisters, if our lips are closed to murmuring, then our eyes can be opened. I so pray for us all in the holy name of Jesus Christ, amen.

President Hinckley

Elder Neal A. Maxwell of the Council of the Twelve has just spoken to us.

President Gordon B. Hinckley

Appreciation for President Benson

We come now to the conclusion of this great conference. President Benson asked President Monson in the opening session to read a message from him, which was beautiful and inclusive and of great value to us. He has felt that he would not speak in this session.

We commemorated President Benson's ninetieth birthday last August fourth with a great celebration in this Tabernacle, which was carried to the Church across the nation and even to some foreign areas. His life has been rich and wonderful and marvelous. His service has been tremendous and unceasing. His love for the people has been deep and magnificent.

I know that he would have me express in his behalf his deep love for each of you, for you members of the Church throughout the world wherever you may be; likewise, he would extend that love to those who are not members of the Church, for he stands as a prophet of the Lord Jesus Christ, extending in his life and in his authority as that prophet all of the love which the Lord would have his children receive.

"We ever pray for thee, our prophet dear." God bless you for your great leadership, for your dedicated service, for your example to us, for your love of God expressed through your service to His children.

As we conclude this conference, we express our sincere appreciation to the Mormon Youth Chorus, the Polynesian choir, the Tabernacle Choir, and their conductors and organists for their beautiful and inspiring music.

The Tabernacle Choir: a national treasure

May I say concerning this great Tabernacle Choir, which has sung for us today, that it has become an institution in the Church and has become, as expressed by a great national leader, a national treasure. They are dedicated and wonderful people, skillfully led and directed by good and able leaders, who sing the glories of God each week to a vast audience from sea to shining sea across this land and have been doing so for sixty years. Last July that anniversary was celebrated here, again in this Tabernacle. Think of it — six decades without an interruption of singing as the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, representatives of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. There is nothing like it in the history of broadcasting in this nation or in any other nation. They have now given 3,127 continuous programs, that number being the number of the program that was given this morning. We salute them. We honor them. We praise them. We thank them for their dedicated service and their unmatched contributions.

The roots of this choir lie in the soil of this block. It was 140 or more years ago — first in the old Bowery and then in the old Tabernacle, which stood just to the south of us — that a group of singers first raised their voices in this valley in praise to God. The choir they began has gone on ever since and in the process grown better with age. Thank you so very, very much.

We thank our city officials for the cooperation given this conference, the Relief Society, the doctors and Church