Elder Maxwell recounts blessings

Battle against cancer brings ‘sharper focus’

By Lynn Arave
Deseret News staff writer

Elder Neal A. Maxwell of the LDS Church’s Quorum of the Twelve appears to be recovering nicely from leukemia. But contrary to what many people may suspect, he considers his cancerous disease to be more of a blessing than anything else.

Speaking at the annual National Cancer Survivors Day for Utah at Hogle Zoo Saturday, he said one of the blessings of cancer is that it can help a person sort out the big things from the little things in life.

"We have a different perspective, a sharper focus," he said about cancer patients. "I've been given by the Lord a delay en route."

Elder Maxwell, 72, said hair is one of those things that doesn't seem as important after suffering from cancer. A loving conversation with your family, however, ends up seeming very critical.

He was diagnosed with leukemia three years ago. It was caught fairly early but was progressing very rapidly. He had multiple chemothrapiies and ended up spending 46 days in the hospital.

Elder Maxwell was only able to work part time in his church duties until 10 months ago when he regained his

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strength and returned to full-time status.
"I feel much better now," he said.
He's still receiving some chemothera
dy but remains very hopeful.
"Each of us faces an eventual exit route," he said of life.
Elder Maxwell said quite a number of general authorities of The
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter
day Saints have been stricken with
cancer, including President Spencer
W. Kimball, Elder Bruce R.
McConkie and President Howard
W. Hunter.
"There's no immunity from suf
fering," he said of church leaders.
"Only variation from suffering.
How we handle it is the key." He's especially thankful for the special care his wife, Colleen,
whom he describes as a "Florence Nightingale," provided him.
Elder Maxwell said leukemia
also has given him a much greater appreciation of the atonement
of Jesus Christ. Another blessing he made reference to from his illness
was a better capacity to receive
help from others.
"We must learn to receive," he said.
He said he also has a greater re
spect for the doctors and nurses
who deal with cancer patients on a
daily basis. He credited the ad
vances of medical science for also helping more cancer patients recover.
"I'm wiser by the experience," he said.
The church leader advised can
cer patients against wondering
why me and why now? He urged
patients not to allow tomorrow to
overhang today and to continue to
avoid self-pity.
He had told the organizers of the
event that he wasn't looking for any special treatment or recogni
tion there. He was just glad to at
tend such an event where special
kindness can be felt.
"I draw from their fellowship," he
said.
Indeed, he was not dressed in
the usual suit and tie apparel of
the general authority, but rather a
jacket, T-shirt and casual pants.

He even carried and sometimes
wore a baseball cap.
Heidi Lindsay, a 19-year-old
with Hodgkin's disease, said the
toughest thing she has to learn is
letting other people help her.
"A positive attitude will get you
through anything," she said.
Doug Bates, another survivor,
said he believes cancer is actu
ally harder on the people that care
about us than anyone else.
"I know how I feel on a given
day. My wife doesn't," said the at
orney for the State Office of Ed
ication. "She worries... I'd rather be the patient than the
caregiver."

Cancer survivors were given a
free admission day at the zoo Sat
urday, plus a picnic lunch and a
chance to attend a Salt Lake Buzz
baseball game in the evening.
Event organizers also are plan
ning another hike to Kings Peak,
plus a tram ride to Hidden Peak in
July, as well as a candlelight vigil
Sept. 25.

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