

From I'll Try to I Will Do

LEE F. BRAITHWAITE

Right up front I would like to thank Kay Johnson. She has helped me with all of the details and has granted all of my wishes except one. I asked her if I could bring my cardiologist along with me to sit by my side. Hopefully I can get through this talk without needing one.

I love BYU. I love the students here. I love the faculty and the staff and the administrators. I have made many friends while being here.

I'm going to focus on being a good friend, and I ask that all of you might reflect on what kind of a friend you are. We all function so much better when we are friends. We are united.

I love to tell stories. I hope you like to listen to stories. I'm going to start with life before kindergarten, then life during grade school, then junior high, then high school, and then college. Now, I very much dislike boasting, so I'm going to tell you stories, by and large, of events in which I did some dumb things and good friends picked me up.

How do we qualify as a good friend? How may we be a good friend to others on a constant basis? I believe a true friend is a person who will bring out the best in us. We can have friends who do not bring out the best in us. I hope we all have friends who lift us up. We all need to be lifted in life.

My first story involves a time when I was three and a half years of age. My mother called to me and said, "Lee, hurry up and get ready for church."

I was very defensive and said, "I do not want to go to church."

She said, "But Jesus wants you to."

I defiantly stated, "I never see *Him* there."

Well, it is funny, but my mother wasn't amused. She knew her work was cut out for her, and she started reading from a book that she had had when she was a small girl—the same book that President Hinckley had had when he was the same age as my mother. Their mothers read to them.

This is a book that I still have. Light blue and dog-eared, it's entitled *The Life of Our Lord*, and it was a beautiful book, especially when Mother read.

I remember that she placed a beautiful picture of the Savior over the piano in our living room as a constant reminder, and I have loved that picture. When my mother passed away, we hung the picture on the wall in our family room. Oh, how I love my family: my

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mother and father, my grandparents, and my many relatives. Eight of my 10 children are here, and one is in Detroit and one is in Baltimore. I know I love all of them more because I learned to love my Savior.

Going to elementary school in the fifth grade, I did something really dumb. Just before Valentine's Day my teacher asked all of us children to make Valentine boxes out of shoeboxes. You've probably done the same thing; you might still do it today. We had white paper and white paper lace and red hearts. On Valentine's morning Mother said, "Now, Lee, you remember to give a Valentine to each one of the pupils in your class."

Well, I went to school, and before school began I started stuffing valentines into boxes, but I didn't take the advice of my mother. Have you ever done that? It's dumb, isn't it? Well, I gave a valentine to everyone except for one girl. She was obnoxious, she was mean, and she probably could have beaten up on me if she wanted to.

When it came time to tear our Valentine's boxes apart, I glanced over at the girl. She had tears rolling down her cheeks; she didn't have a single valentine. I hurt to this day that I didn't pay heed to my mother. I've noticed during the years that a lot of people need friends, true friends. And if anyone ever did, she did. I became a better friend to her, but it was too late to relieve the negative situation. May we listen to our true friends and do the right things.

Of junior high, probably like most of you, I can't remember too much. But I remember my grandfather. He was old, and he related stories to me as a small boy. I heard those stories at least three dozen times. But I tried hard to listen intently. I think I was the only one who ever listened to him. I listened because I loved him.

Well, when I got into high school, my friends and my brother and I would play basketball at the end of our barn with an old rusty rim,

a homemade backboard, and a gunnysack for a net. We had fun there. One day it was very overcast, and I looked across the wet, recently plowed field and saw my little granddaddy from England trudging across the field. As he got closer I noticed that he had huge mud balls on his boots.

I went up to him, and he said, "Lee, if you will practice over and over many times, you will get good." Then he turned and went back and made larger balls of mud on his feet.

I thought, "Granddaddy, you are crazy! You came all this way just to tell me that?" But over the years I found he was a true friend. He helped me practice and practice.

He helped me when I went to college. I took a class for which I had little preparation. I was very frightened. I didn't think I could pass it, let alone get a good grade. I remembered my granddaddy's story, and I studied, believe it or not—and surprising to myself—six hours each school day. If we practice and practice, we will get good. I hope all of you students will study hard, not only the subjects that you really like but especially those that you have been avoiding. Study and study until you do well.

In high school something really special took place. One beautiful Sabbath morning my mother called upstairs to me and said, "Lee, are you ready to go to conference?"

I said, "No, I don't feel well."

Trusting me, she said, "Okay."

Well, I didn't feel bad physically, but I was really bad as far as attitude goes. It was the first time I had done that, and all during conference I couldn't read the books I loved to read. I couldn't concentrate. I wished I had gone.

Father was in the stake presidency, and once he found out what really happened, I knew that he would know I had let him down. After conference the stake presidency and Elder Mark E. Petersen and his wife came to our home. When Elder Petersen came into our living room, I could hear him; he had a strong voice. He said, "I'd like to meet your family."

Oh, I felt bad. I wished I were in my best clothes. My father introduced my good brother and my three good sisters, and Elder Petersen said, "Is this all?"

Father said, "No. I have one more son."

I then really felt badly when Elder Petersen asked, "Where is he?"

Father said, "Upstairs."

Elder Petersen said, "I would like to meet him."

I felt like leaping out of our attic window, but I decided to stay and take it. Two pairs of giant steps came up the wooden stairs. When Elder Petersen got up to the top, he looked all around. I was really shaking. He looked and saw all the marine specimens I had on my shelves, all the books I had purchased, and my microscope. He saw my little room that I had turned into a lab of study. Then, instead of calling me to repentance, he very kindly said, "Lee." And in that powerful voice he said, "What are you going to do with all of this?"

I could hardly talk, and I said, "I would like to be a marine biologist."

He said, "What do you mean, 'like to'?"
Are you?"

A powerful lesson was learned. There is a big difference between liking to accomplish something and doing it—a big difference. I tell that story often to students. It can mean the difference between trying to reach the celestial kingdom and qualifying for it. It can mean graduating from BYU—not just trying, but doing it. It can mean getting a master's degree. It can mean getting a PhD. Oh, how Elder Petersen helped me. He helped me through the tough times.

Now I'd like to focus on the time I've been here. I'm no spring chicken; I've been teaching here since 1964. I've learned some important things. I have learned to be kind to everyone wherever I go, but especially here at BYU. I have learned that it really pays to make friends with as many professors, administrators, staff, physical plant people, and even custodians

as I can. Some of my best friends at BYU are found scattered all over the campus. I wish I had more time to get into more buildings and make more friends.

Friends are really important, and, as a professor, I truly believe that it is very important to be friends with students. When I first started teaching at BYU, one of the senior faculty members counseled me. He said, "Never get too close to your students or they won't work as hard." Well, I really like that professor, and I tried to follow his advice, but in time I found that he was wrong—very wrong. If I become a friend to my students, they work more, not less.

One day, just after I started teaching at BYU, an aunt of mine who was like a second mother to me posed a question: "Lee, do you give all of your students A's?"

I said, "Of course not. They don't all earn A's."

And she said, "If you taught well enough, they would get A's."

Wow, I'd never thought of that before. I didn't believe her at first. Then, as I got a little bit older and a bit wiser—the older part came easy, the wiser part was difficult—I found out that if I got close to my students and required them to work hard, they would be better students. It doesn't benefit a student at all if we give that student a high grade and the student hasn't earned it. It doesn't benefit us as professors here at BYU or benefit the students if we send them off with perfect letters of recommendation when they are not at the level to earn all of the compliments given. It will be hard for our students to get into schools from that point on. And professors will lose their credibility.

I had a good friend who retired from geology a short time ago. He said, "Lee, if I had to do it over again, I would take better care of the students who are struggling." He said, "I have noticed over the years that you have done that." I have given extra help to some, but there are so many that I haven't been able to give it to all.

Let me tell you one last story—about a student I took to the Friday Harbor labs at the University of Washington. One day after fieldwork I gave the students an examination to see if they retained the names of the critters that they saw and collected. I came up to this fellow and said, “That’s a great grade. You only missed six.”

He said, “Dr. Braithwaite, six is the number I got right.”

I started noticing him. He was very quiet. I could tell he was a troubled young man. In time I got close to him, and he related to me that when he was a small boy, he was put in charge of tending his little brother, and he got distracted by his friends. His mother came home, and she asked where his little brother was.

“Oh,” it dawned on this student, “I have left him for a long time!” He and his friends and mother went searching, and the little brother was found in the ditch, drowned.

That had haunted him all those days and was still haunting him. He never smiled; he was always quiet. I thought, “What can I do

to pick this student up?” Then the branch president asked me if I would select some of my students to speak and sing in sacrament meeting, and I thought, “I will ask this student to sing.” I had heard him sing to himself, and he had a beautiful voice. So he sang “I Know That My Redeemer Lives.” Everyone in the congregation had tears running down their face. I did, too. From that time on that young man was accepted by the students. He was a hero. He had many good friends.

Brothers and sisters, good friends are so important to each of us. May we be true friends and lift up as many as we can. May we do this with the spirit that President Hinckley so beautifully extends to us. May we follow our prophet perfectly. May we follow our Father in Heaven as perfectly as possible. May we follow our Savior the very best we can. May we be good friends, true friends. May we not disappoint our families and our friends as we sojourn here at BYU and after. I say these things from my heart and in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.