

The Eternal Perspective of the Gospel

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For decisions that affect eternity, having a gospel perspective is essential.

In a revelation given to Moses, we are told of our Heavenly Father's declared intention: "For behold, this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man."¹ According to that statement, the Father's desire is to give everyone the opportunity to receive a fulness of joy. Latter-day revelations show that our Heavenly Father created a great plan of happiness for all His children, a very special plan so that we can return to live with Him.

Understanding this plan of happiness provides us with an eternal perspective and helps us to truly value the commandments, the ordinances, the covenants, and the trials and tribulations.

One key principle comes from Alma: "Therefore God gave unto them commandments, after having made known unto them the plan of redemption."²

It is interesting to note the sequence in the teaching process. Our Heavenly Father first taught Adam and Eve the plan of redemption, and then He gave them commandments.

This is a great truth. Understanding the plan will help people keep the commandments, make better decisions, and have the right motivation.

During the time that I have served in the Church, I have witnessed the devotion and faithfulness of Church members in different countries, some of which have political, social, or economic conflict. One common factor that I have often found in these faithful members is the perspective that they have of eternity. The eternal perspective of the gospel leads us to understand the place that we occupy in God's plan, to accept difficulties and progress through them, to make decisions, and to center our lives on our divine potential.

Perspective is the way we see things when we look at them from a certain distance, and it allows us to appreciate their true value.

It is like being in a forest and having a tree in front of us. Unless we step back a little, we will not be able to appreciate what a forest really is. I once visited the Amazon jungle in Leticia, Colombia, near the borders of Brazil and Peru. I was not able to appreciate its magnitude until I flew over it and gained perspective.

When our children were little, they used to watch a children's television channel that featured a program called *What Do You See?* The screen would zoom in very closely on something, and the children had to guess what it was as the

image gradually widened. Once the entire object was visible, you could easily tell that it was a cat, a plant, a piece of fruit, and so on.

I remember that on one occasion they were watching that program and it showed something very close up that looked very ugly to them, even repulsive; but as the image widened, they realized that it was a very appetizing pizza. Then they said to me, “Daddy, buy us one just like that!” After they understood what it was, something that at first had looked unpleasant to them ended up being something very attractive.

Let me share another experience. In our home our children liked to do jigsaw puzzles. We have probably all had the opportunity to do a puzzle. Some are made up of many small pieces. I remember that one of our children (I won't give his name in order to protect his identity) used to focus on the individual pieces, and when one did not fit in the place where he thought it should, he would become angry and assume it was no good and want to throw it away. He finally learned to do the puzzle when he understood that each small piece had its place in the final picture, even when he did not know where it fit at a given moment.

This is one way of contemplating the Lord's plan. We do not have to concern ourselves with each of its parts separately but rather to try to bring the entire picture into focus, keeping in mind what the final result will be. The Lord knows where each piece belongs so that it fits into the plan. All the commandments are of eternal importance in the context of the great plan of happiness.

It is extremely important that we do not make decisions of eternal value from the perspective of mortality. For decisions that affect eternity, having a gospel perspective is essential.

Elder Neal A. Maxwell taught: “Though ‘anchored’ in grand and ultimate hope, some of our tactical hopes are another matter. We may hope for a pay raise, a special date, an electoral victory, or for a bigger house—things which may or may not be realized. Faith in Father's plan gives us endurance even amid the wreckage of such proximate hopes. Hope keeps us ‘anxiously engaged’ in good causes even when these appear to be losing causes (see D&C 58:27).”³

Not having an eternal perspective, or losing it, can lead us to have an earthly perspective as our personal standard and to make decisions that are not in harmony with the will of God.

The Book of Mormon mentions the attitude that Nephi took and the attitude of Laman and Lemuel. They had all suffered much difficulty and numerous afflictions; however, their attitudes toward them were very different. Nephi said, “And so great were the blessings of the Lord upon us, that while we did live upon raw meat in the wilderness, our women did give plenty of suck for their children, and were strong, yea, even like unto the men; and they began to bear their journeyings without murmurings.”⁴

Laman and Lemuel, on the other hand, complained bitterly. “And thus Laman and Lemuel, being the eldest, did murmur against their father. And they did murmur because they knew not the dealings of that God who had created them.”⁵ Not knowing or disregarding “the dealings of ... God” is one way of losing eternal perspective, and murmuring is just one of the symptoms. Even though Laman and Lemuel witnessed many miracles along with Nephi, they exclaimed, saying: “And we have wandered in the wilderness for these many years; and our women have toiled, being big with child; and they have borne children in the wilderness and suffered all things, save it were death; and it would have been better that they had died before they came out of Jerusalem than to have suffered these afflictions.”⁶

Those were two very different attitudes, even though the difficulties and afflictions they had faced were similar.

Obviously, their perspectives were different.

President Spencer W. Kimball wrote the following: “If we looked at mortality as the whole of existence, then pain, sorrow, failure, and short life would be calamity. But if we look upon life as an eternal thing stretching far into the premortal past and on into the eternal post-death future, then all happenings may be put in proper perspective.”⁷

Elder David B. Haight told a story about the sculptor Michelangelo to illustrate the importance of seeing everything in proper perspective: “As the sculptor was chiseling a block of marble, a boy came every day and watched shyly. When the figure of David emerged and appeared from that stone, complete for all the world to admire, the boy asked Michelangelo, ‘How did you know he was in there?’”⁸

The perspective with which the sculptor saw that block of marble was different than that of the boy who was watching him work. The artist’s vision of the possibilities encased in the stone allowed him to create a work of art.

The Lord knows what He wants to accomplish with each one of us. He knows the kind of reform He wants to achieve in our lives, and we do not have the right to counsel Him. His thoughts are higher than our thoughts.⁹

I testify that we have a loving, just, and merciful Heavenly Father, who has prepared a plan for our eternal happiness. I testify that Jesus Christ is His Son and the Savior of the world. I know that President Thomas S. Monson is a prophet of God. I say these things in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

1. Moses 1:39.

2. Alma 12:32.

3. Neal A. Maxwell, “Brightness of Hope,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1994, 35–36.

4. 1 Nephi 17:2.

5. 1 Nephi 2:12.

6. 1 Nephi 17:20.

7. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Spencer W. Kimball* (2006), 15.

8. David B. Haight, “Your Purpose and Responsibility” (Brigham Young University fireside, Sept. 4, 1977), 2–3; speeches.byu.edu.

9. See Isaiah 55:8–9.

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