

Lord, Wilt Thou Cause That My Eyes May Be Opened

October 2017 General Conference

By Elder W. Craig Zwick
Emeritus Member of the Seventy

We must look at others through the eyes of our Savior.

The Lion King is a classic animated film about the African savanna. When the lion king dies while saving his son, the young lion prince is forced into exile while a despot ruler destroys the balance of the savanna. The lion prince reclaims the kingdom through the help of a mentor. His eyes are opened to the necessity of balance in the great circle of life on the savanna. Claiming his rightful place as king, the young lion followed counsel to “look beyond what you see.”¹

As we learn to become inheritors of all our Father has, the gospel mentors us to look beyond what we see. To look beyond what we see, we must look at others through the eyes of our Savior. The gospel net is filled with people in all their variety. We can't fully understand the choices and psychological backgrounds of people in our world, Church congregations, and even in our families, because we rarely have the whole picture of who they are. We must look past the easy assumptions and stereotypes and widen the tiny lens of our own experience.

I had my eyes opened to “looking beyond what I could see” while serving as a mission president. A young elder arrived with apprehension in his eyes. As we met in an interview, he said dejectedly, “I want to go home.” I thought to myself, “Well, we can fix this.” I counseled him to work hard and to pray about it for a week and then call me. A week later, almost to the minute, he called. He still wanted to go home. I again counseled him to pray, to work hard, and to call me in a week. In our next interview, things had not changed. He insisted on going home.

I just wasn't going to let that happen. I began teaching him about the sacred nature of his call. I encouraged him to “forget [himself] and go to work.”² But no matter what formula I offered, his mind did not change. It finally occurred to me that I might not have the whole picture. It was then that I felt a prompting to ask him the question: “Elder, what is hard for you?” What he said pierced my heart: “President, I can't read.”

The wise counsel which I thought was so important for him to hear was not at all relevant to his needs. What he needed most was for me to look beyond my hasty assessment and allow the Spirit to help me understand what was really on this elder's mind. He needed me to see him correctly and offer a reason to hope. Instead, I acted

like a giant demolition wrecking ball. This valiant elder did learn to read and became a very pure disciple of Jesus Christ. He opened my eyes to the Lord's words: "For man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7).

What a blessing it is when the Spirit of the Lord widens our view. Remember the prophet Elisha, who woke up to find the Syrian army surrounding his city with their horses and chariots? His manservant was frightened and asked Elisha what they were going to do against such odds. Elisha told him not to worry, with the memorable words: "Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them" (2 Kings 6:16). The manservant had no idea what the prophet was talking about. He could not look beyond what he could see. However, Elisha saw battalions of angels prepared to do battle for the prophet's people. So Elisha prayed to the Lord to open the eyes of the young man, "and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha" (2 Kings 6:17).

We often separate ourselves from others by the differences in what we see. We feel comfortable around those who think, talk, dress, and act like we do and uncomfortable with those who come from different circumstances or backgrounds. In reality, don't we all come from different countries and speak different languages? Don't we all see the world through the enormous limitations of our own life experience? For some see and speak with spiritual eyes, as the prophet Elisha, and some see and communicate with literal sight, as I experienced with my illiterate missionary.

We live in a world that feeds on comparisons, labeling, and criticism. Instead of seeing through the lens of social media, we need to look inward for the godly attributes to which we each lay claim. These godly qualities and longings cannot be posted on Pinterest or Instagram.

To accept and love others does not mean we must embrace their ideas. Obviously, truth mandates our highest allegiance, though it should never be a barrier to kindness. Truly loving others requires the ongoing practice of accepting the best efforts of people whose life experiences and limitations we may never fully know. Looking beyond what we can see requires conscious focus on the Savior.

On May 28, 2016, 16-year-old Beau Richey and his friend Austin were at a family ranch in Colorado. Beau and Austin climbed into their all-terrain vehicles with great anticipation for a day of adventure. They had not gone far when they encountered precarious conditions, at which point tragedy struck. The vehicle Beau was driving flipped over suddenly, pinning Beau under 400 pounds (180 kg) of steel. When Beau's friend Austin got to him, he saw Beau struggling for his life. With every bit of his strength, he tried to pull the vehicle off his friend. It wouldn't budge. He prayed for Beau and then frantically went for help. Emergency personnel finally arrived, but a few hours later Beau died. He was released from this mortal life.

His heartbroken parents arrived. As they stood in the small hospital with Beau's dearest friend and family members, a police officer entered the room and handed Beau's cell phone to his mother. As she took the phone, an audible alarm sounded. She opened the phone and saw Beau's daily alarm. She read aloud the message her fun-loving, highly adventurous teenage son had set to read every day. It said, "Remember to put Jesus Christ at the center of your life today."

Beau's focus on his Redeemer does not lessen his loved ones' sorrow in his absence. However, it gives great hope and meaning to Beau's life and life choices. It allows his family and friends to look beyond only the grief of his early death to the joyful realities of the next life. What a tender mercy for Beau's parents to see through their son's eyes the thing he most prized.

As members of the Church, we have been gifted personal spiritual alarms that warn us when we are looking with only mortal eyes away from salvation. The sacrament is our weekly reminder to continually focus on Jesus Christ that we might always remember Him and that we might always have His Spirit to be with us (see D&C 20:77). Yet we sometimes ignore these feelings of reminder and alarm. When we have Jesus Christ at the center of our lives, He will cause that our eyes may be opened to larger possibilities than we alone can comprehend.

I received this really interesting letter about a protective alarm experienced by a faithful sister. She told me that in an effort to help her husband understand how she felt, she began to keep an electronic list on her phone of things he did or said that irritated her. She reasoned that when the time was right, she would have compiled written proof to share with him that would make him want to change his ways. However, one Sunday while partaking of the sacrament and focusing on the Atonement of the Savior, she realized that documenting her negative feelings about her husband was truly driving the Spirit from her and was never going to change him.

A spiritual alarm went off in her heart that said: "Let it go; let it all go. Delete those notes. They are not helpful." She then wrote, and I quote: "It took me a while to hit 'select all' and even longer to hit 'delete.' But as I did, all of those negative feelings were lost in space. My heart filled with love—love for my husband and love for the Lord." Like Saul on the road to Damascus, she had her vision changed. The scales of distortion fell from her eyes.

Our Savior frequently opened eyes of the physically and spiritually blind. Opening our eyes to divine truth, literally and figuratively, prepares us to be healed of mortal shortsightedness. When we pay attention to spiritual "alarms" that signal a need for course correction or larger eternal perspective, we are receiving the sacramental promise to have His Spirit to be with us. This happened to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery in the Kirtland Temple when compelling truths were taught by Jesus Christ, who promised that "the veil" of mortal limitations would be "taken from [their] minds, and the eyes of [their] understanding [would be] opened" (D&C 110:1).

I witness that through the power of Jesus Christ, we become able to look spiritually beyond what we see literally. As we remember Him and have His Spirit with us, our eyes of understanding will be opened. Then the great reality of the divinity within every one of us will be more powerfully impressed upon our hearts. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

© 2017 by Intellectual Reserve, Inc. All rights reserved.