

Seeing God's Family through the Overview Lens

By Sister Tamara W. Runia

First Counselor in the Young Women General Presidency

I believe we can, through the eye of faith, zoom out and view ourselves and our families with hope and joy.

When our youngest daughter, Berkeley, was little, I started using reading glasses—the kind that zoom in and magnify everything. One day, as we sat together reading a book, I looked at her with love but also sadness because, suddenly, she seemed more grown up. I thought, “Where has the time gone? She’s so big!”

As I lifted my reading glasses to wipe away a tear, I realized, “Oh wait—she’s not bigger; it’s just these glasses! Never mind!”

Sometimes all we can see is that up-close, magnified view of those we love. Tonight, I invite you to zoom out and look through a different lens—an eternal lens that focuses on the big picture, your bigger story.

During humankind’s early push into space, the unmanned rockets had no windows. But by the *Apollo 8* mission to the moon, the astronauts had one. While floating in space, they were struck by the power of seeing our earth and took this spectacular image, capturing the whole world’s attention! Those astronauts experienced a sensation so powerful it has been given its own name: the overview effect.

Viewing from a new vantage point changes *everything*. One space traveler said it “reduces things to a size that you think everything is manageable. ... We can do this. Peace on earth—no problem. It gives people that type of energy ... that type of power.”¹

As humans, we have an earthbound point of view, but God sees the grand overview of the universe. He sees all creation, all of us, and is filled with hope.

Is it possible to begin to see as God sees even while living on the surface of this planet—to feel this *overview* feeling? I believe we can, through the eye of faith, zoom out and view ourselves and our families with hope and joy.

The scriptures agree. Moroni speaks about those whose faith was so “exceedingly strong” that they “truly saw ... with an eye of faith, *and they were glad.*”²

With an eye focused on the Savior, they felt joy and knew this truth: because of Christ, it all works out. Everything *you* and *you* and *you* are worried about—it’s all going to be OK! And those who look with an eye of faith can *feel* that it’s going to be OK *now*.

I went through a rough patch my senior year in high school when I wasn't making great choices. I remember seeing my mom crying, and I wondered if I'd disappointed her. At the time, I worried that her tears meant she'd lost hope for me, and if she didn't feel hope for me, maybe there wasn't a way back.

But my dad was more practiced at zooming out and taking the long view. He'd learned from experience that worry feels a lot like love, but it's not the same.³ He used the eye of faith to see that everything would work out, and his hopeful approach changed me.

When I graduated from high school and went to BYU, my dad sent letters reminding me of who I was. He became my cheerleader, and everybody needs a cheerleader—someone who isn't telling you, "You're not running fast enough"; they're lovingly reminding you that you can.

Dad exemplified Lehi's dream. Like Lehi, he knew that you don't chase after your loved ones who feel lost. "You stay where you are and call them. You go to the tree, stay at the tree, keep eating the fruit and, with a smile on your face, continue to beckon to those you love and show by example that eating the fruit is a happy thing!"⁴

This visual image has helped me during low moments when I find myself at the tree, eating the fruit and crying because I'm worried; and really, how helpful is that? Instead, let's choose hope—hope in our Creator and in one another, fueling our ability to be better than we are right now.

Shortly after Elder Neal A. Maxwell passed away, a reporter asked his son what he'd miss most. He said dinners at his parents' house because he always left feeling like his dad believed in him.

This was around the time our adult children were starting to come home for Sunday dinners with their spouses. During the week, I found myself making lists in my mind of things I could remind them of on Sunday, like "Maybe try and help out more with the kids when you're home" or "Don't forget to be a good listener."

When I read Brother Maxwell's comment, I threw away the lists and silenced that critical voice, so when I saw my grown children for that brief time each week, I focused on the many positive things they were already doing. When our oldest son, Ryan, passed away a few years later, I remember being grateful our time together was happier and more positive.

Before we interact with a loved one, can we ask ourselves the question "Is what I'm about to do or say helpful or hurtful?" Our words are one of our superpowers, and family members are like human blackboards, standing in front of us saying, "Write what you think of me!" These messages, whether intentional or unintentional, should be hopeful and encouraging.⁵

Our job is not to teach someone who's going through a rough patch that they are bad or disappointing. On rare occasions we may feel prompted to correct, but most often let's tell our loved ones in spoken and unspoken ways the messages they long to hear: "Our family feels whole and complete because you are in it." "You will be loved for the rest of your life—no matter what."

Sometimes what we need is empathy more than advice; listening more than a lecture; someone who hears and wonders, "How would I have to feel to say what they just said?"

Remember, families are a God-given laboratory where we're figuring things out, so missteps and miscalculations are not just possible but probable. And wouldn't it be interesting if, at the end of our lives, we could see that those relationships, even those challenging moments, were the very things that helped us to become more like our Savior? Each difficult interaction is an opportunity to learn how to love at a deeper level—a godlike level.⁶

Let's zoom out to view family relationships as a powerful vehicle to teach us the lessons we came here to learn as we turn to the Savior.

Let's admit, in a fallen world there's no way to be a perfect spouse, parent, son or daughter, grandchild, mentor, or friend—but a million ways to be a good one.⁷ Let's stay at the tree, partake of the love of God, and share it. By lifting the people around us, we ascend together.

Unfortunately, the memory of eating the fruit is not enough; we need to partake again and again in ways that reposition our lens and connect us to the heavenly overview by opening up the scriptures, which are filled with light, to chase away the darkness, staying on our knees until our casual prayer turns mighty. This is when hearts soften, and we begin to see as God sees.

In these last days, perhaps our greatest work will be with our loved ones—good people living in a wicked world. *Our* hope changes the way they see themselves and who they really are. And through this lens of love, they'll see who they *will* become.

But the adversary does not want us or our loved ones to return home together. And *because* we live on a planet that is bound by time and a finite number of years,⁸ he tries to perpetuate a very real sense of panic in us. It's hard to see, when we're zoomed in, that our direction matters more than our speed.

Remember, "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together."⁹ Thankfully, the God we worship is *not* bound by time. He sees who our loved ones really are and who *we* really are.¹⁰ So He's patient with us, hoping we'll be patient with each other.

I will admit there are times when earth, our temporal home, feels like an island of sorrow—moments when I have one eye of faith and the other eye is weeping.¹¹ Do you know this feeling?

I had it Tuesday.

Can we instead choose the faithful posture of our prophet when he promises miracles in our families? If we do, our joy will increase even if turbulence increases. He's promising that an overview effect can be experienced *now*, regardless of our circumstances.¹²

Having this eye of faith *now* is a recapturing, or an echo, of the faith we had before we came to this planet. It sees past the uncertainty of a moment, allowing us to "cheerfully do all things that lie in our power; and then ... stand still."¹³

Is there something difficult in your life right now, something you're worried can't be resolved? Without the eye of faith, that might feel like God has lost oversight of things, and is that true?

Or maybe your greater fear is that you're going to go through this difficult time all by yourself, but that would mean God has abandoned you, and is that true?

It is my witness that the Savior has the ability, because of His Atonement, to turn any nightmare you are going through into a blessing. He has given us a promise “with an immutable covenant” that as we strive to love and follow Him, “*all things* wherewith [we] have been afflicted shall work together for [our] good.”¹⁴ *All things*.

And because we are children of the covenant, we can ask for this hopeful feeling *now*!

While our families aren't perfect, we can *perfect* our love for others until it becomes a constant, unchanging, no-matter-what kind of love—the type of love that supports change and allows for growth and return.

It's the Savior's work to bring our loved ones back. It's *His* work and *His* timing. It is *our* work to provide the hope and a heart they can come home to. “We have neither [God's] authority to condemn nor His power to redeem, but we have been authorized to exercise His love.”¹⁵

President Nelson has also taught that others need our love more than our judgment. “They need to experience the pure love of Jesus Christ reflected in [our] words and actions.”¹⁶

Love is the thing that changes hearts. It is the purest motive of all, and others can feel it. Let's hold fast to these prophetic words offered 50 years ago: “No home is a failure unless it quits trying.”¹⁷ Surely, those who love the most and the longest win!

In earthly families, we're simply doing what God has done with us—pointing the way and hoping our loved ones will go in that direction, knowing the path they travel is theirs to choose.

And when they pass to the other side of the veil and draw close to that loving “gravitational pull” of their heavenly home,¹⁸ I believe it will feel familiar because of how they were loved here.

Let's use that *overview lens* and see the people we love and live with as shared companions on this beautiful planet.

You and I? We can do this! We can hold on and hope on! We can stay at the tree and partake of the fruit with a smile on our face, letting the Light of Christ in our eyes become something others can count on in their darkest hours. As they see light manifest in our countenances, they will be drawn to it. We can then help refocus their attention to the original source of love and light, “the bright and morning star,” Jesus Christ.¹⁹

I bear my testimony that this—all of this—is going to turn out so much better than we could ever imagine! With an eye of faith on Jesus Christ, may we see that everything will be all right in the end and feel that it will be all right *now*. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Anousheh Ansari, in “The Overview Effect and Other Musings on Earth and Humanity, according to Space Travelers,” cocre.co.
2. Ether 12:19; emphasis added.
3. See Jody Moore, “How to Say Hard Things,” *Better Than Happy* (podcast), Sept. 18, 2020, episode 270.
4. Ronald E. Bartholomew, used with permission; see also 1 Nephi 8:10; 11:21–22.

5. See James D. MacArthur, "The Functional Family," *Marriage and Families*, vol. 16 (2005), 14.
6. Made possible as we "pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart, that [we] may be filled with this love" (Moroni 7:48).
7. Paraphrase of a statement attributed to Jill Churchill.
8. See Richard Eyre, *Life before Life: Origins of the Soul ... Knowing Where You Came from and Who You Really Are* (2000), 107.
9. Traditional proverb.
10. See Doctrine and Covenants 93:24, 26.
11. See Robert Frost, "Birches," in *Mountain Interval* (1916), 39.
12. See Russell M. Nelson, "Joy and Spiritual Survival," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2016, 81–84; see also Russell M. Nelson, "Let God Prevail," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2020, 92–95.
13. Doctrine and Covenants 123:17.
14. Doctrine and Covenants 98:3; emphasis added.
15. Wayne E. Brickey, *Inviting Him In: How the Atonement Can Change Your Family* (2003), 144.
16. See Russell M. Nelson, "Peacemakers Needed," *Liahona*, May 2023, 100.
17. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Harold B. Lee* (2000), 134.
18. See Paul E. Koelliker, "He Truly Loves Us," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2012, 18.
19. Revelation 22:16.