

Eyes to See

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You heard in the introduction that I am a biologist. Not surprisingly, as a young child I had a fascination with catching animals. I went through several phases in this interest. I first fell in love with lizards and toads. I then moved on to turtles and from those to small mammals and birds and fishes. I even had a scorpion phase. That one ended quite abruptly after I caught about a dozen scorpions and brought them into the house. I wanted to preserve them, so I doused them with rubbing alcohol until they no longer moved. I then proudly set each one out on the top of our television set to show my mother, who would be arriving home late that evening.

Apparently I then fell asleep, because the next thing I remember was hearing my mother screaming. I quickly realized that the rubbing alcohol treatment had not worked and that the scorpions were definitely not dead. In fact, they were loose in the house. That ended my scorpion phase.

Today, as a professor of biology, my students and I continue to collect and study different organisms throughout the world as we seek to understand how the richness of our living world has come about.

One thing I have learned in all of my years of collecting is that you need to know what you are looking for. In biology we refer to this as developing a “search image.” Many species show remarkable adaptations that make it difficult for them to be found. A quick search on the Internet for “hidden animal images” will show just how striking some of these creatures are. Among the many images you will find will be geckos that look like dried-up leaves, frogs that have the shape and color of lichen, spiders that blend in with wood, green caterpillars with stripes that almost perfectly match the venation of leaves, and owls whose feathers look so much like the trees they perch on that a person could walk by one and never even know it was there. It often takes a bit of work to detect these hidden organisms, but with a trained eye and experience, you get better and better at it.

Today I would like to focus my thoughts on the idea of developing *eyes to see*. Just as a biologist must learn how to see organisms

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in their natural habitat, each of us has been invited by Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ to develop spiritual eyes to see and understand certain truths in our world so that we might help bring about God's great purpose, which is to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of all of Heavenly Father's children—including you.

But how exactly does this work? What does it mean to have eyes to see? And how will we know if we have seen what is intended for us? The Savior Himself offered some insight into these questions and warned us that this might not be easy. Do you remember in the book of Matthew in the New Testament when Jesus started teaching in parables and His disciples came to Him and said—and now I am paraphrasing—“Hey, why are you teaching the people in parables?”

I get the sense from the scriptures that the disciples thought that this approach was perhaps too difficult for some of the people. Clearly it was not as easy to understand as the messages He delivered in the Sermon on the Mount. We know that the use of parables was a way to both reveal and conceal. But I want to focus on exactly how Jesus answered this question. Do you remember what He said? In Matthew we read:

He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given.

*For whosoever **receiveth**, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance;*

*But whosoever **continueth not to receive**, from him shall be taken away even that he hath.*

Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they, seeing, see not; and hearing, they hear not; neither do they understand. [JST, Matthew 13:9–12; emphasis added; see also Matthew 13:11–13]

My dear brothers and sisters, sometimes this is us. Sometimes we choose not to receive what God has made available to us. We live in

a world in which it is possible to have spiritual truths and access to revelation all around us, but, for whatever reason, we sometimes fail to find it. The good news is that we can get better and better at developing a spiritual search image. The really good news is that Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ love us so deeply that They have created a world in which there is so much spiritual treasure to see and to find.

With permission, let me share a story of a young man who spotted a spiritual truth intended for him. Wesley was one of my Boy Scouts a few years ago. He had encountered a hardship in his life that would be difficult for anyone to bear, let alone a young boy. His father had died unexpectedly, and Wesley understandably was trying to make sense of it. That summer Wesley came with us to Scout camp. After a full week of fun and adventure together, we all sat around a campfire on our last night and shared feelings about our fears and our hopes and the things that we knew to be true. I will never forget one thing that Wesley said that night. As he looked into the sky he said, “You know, Heavenly Father didn't have to make the world so beautiful, but He did. And so I know that He loves us and that He loves me.”

Wesley didn't just see bright stars and a calm lake and majestic trees. He didn't just see the outcome of the natural processes that have brought about this world. He saw evidence of a loving God and a merciful Savior. Wesley had discovered what Alma had taught and what Moses had taught and what other prophets have taught: that we live in a world with a purpose. In the book of Moses, Jesus Christ said it this way:

And behold, all things have their likeness, and all things are created and made to bear record of me, both things which are temporal, and things which are spiritual; things which are in the heavens above, and things which are on the earth, and things which are in the earth, and things which are under the

earth, both above and beneath: all things bear record of me. [Moses 6:63]

The last phrase in that scripture is important. It says “all things” bear record of Jesus Christ. Do we live so that we see evidence of a loving God in all aspects of our lives, or do we find it only when we decide it is time for formal worship?

I am a biologist, and I am amazed at how frequently I have been taught the lessons of the gospel through examples from the natural world. But we can have faith that regardless of what we study or what our vocation is or where we live or who we are, we can find evidence that Jesus Christ is the Creator and Redeemer of the world and that God the Father lives, that He is literally our Father.

One of the most remarkable things about Brigham Young University is that we invite all members of our community to find what is sacred and spiritual in the work that they do. I recently met with a group of new BYU faculty members. Our discussion centered on how to combine faith and intellect, both in the classroom and in our research. I was deeply impressed as each new faculty member talked about ways that Heavenly Father had blessed them with stronger testimonies as a result of the scientific research they were doing. What they did for their daily work honed their understanding of our Heavenly Father. Of course this invitation to see the hand of the Creator in our lives is extended to all people.

How do we live so that we can develop eyes to see—to see the things all around us that bear witness of Jesus Christ? May I offer two simple suggestions?

First, we must desire it. We must desire to see the world and those around us with spiritual eyes. Elder Neal A. Maxwell said it this way:

Desire denotes a real longing or craving. Hence righteous desires are much more than passive preferences or fleeting feelings. . . .

Therefore, what we insistently desire, over time, is what we will eventually become and what we will receive. [“According to the Desire of [Our] Hearts,” *Ensign*, November 1996, 21]

In that beautiful 29th chapter of Alma in the Book of Mormon, Alma said it this way: “I know that [God] granteth unto men according to their desire . . . ; yea, I know that he allotteth unto men . . . according to their wills” (Alma 29:4). What we righteously desire, we usually get. Unfortunately, the opposite is also true: what we unrighteously desire, we also usually get.

My friend Mike recently taught me the importance of cultivating righteous desires. Mike is a good man. He served for a season as a bishop in a BYU ward and has had great success personally and professionally. He told me that he had been pondering an important question in his life and that this had gone on for some time. He had prayerfully asked for insights that might help him find an answer. Recently he felt impressed to ask Heavenly Father to teach him through his dreams. He confessed to me that he has never really been much of a dreamer, but still he acted on those promptings and asked in faith. In response, he actually had a dream that brought a remarkable peace to him. If we are to see spiritual truths in our lives, we must desire them and, as simple as it sounds, we must ask to see them.

The second thing that we must do to have eyes to see is prepare ourselves to receive personal revelation. Ultimate understanding requires revelation. For some this will be manifested through occasional promptings from the Holy Spirit. For those who have entered into the covenant of baptism, we have a promise that we can have the constant companionship of the Holy Ghost to help us perceive and understand truth. In the Book of Mormon the prophet Moroni taught, “By the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things” (Moroni

10:5). What the Holy Ghost can teach us exceeds what we can discover on our own.

Now it is worth asking what will happen to us as we begin to see the world through spiritual eyes, from the Savior's perspective. First of all, we will undoubtedly learn new truths. Little by little we will better understand the great plan of our Heavenly Father and His will for us. This is how the Lord teaches us, and as we come to recognize His truths, He will reveal more and more to us. In 2 Nephi we read:

For behold, thus saith the Lord God: I will give unto the children of men line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little; and blessed are those who hearken unto my precepts, and lend an ear unto my counsel, for they shall learn wisdom; for unto him that receiveth I will give more; and from them that shall say, We have enough, from them shall be taken away even that which they have. [2 Nephi 28:30]

Hence it is essential that we are consistently receiving revelation. If we are not, we risk losing the understanding that we already have.

There is also a remarkable secondary benefit that will come from this effort. Seeing things from the Savior's perspective will change our attitudes and our behavior. Let me offer a few examples of this. One thing that will likely happen is that we will begin to see others and ourselves for who we really are. Each week I have the opportunity to see the young women in my ward stand and recite these words:

We are daughters of our Heavenly Father, who loves us, and we love Him. We will "stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places" (Mosiah 18:9). [Personal Progress, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2009), 3]

When we see each other as daughters and sons of our Heavenly Father, it changes us. It takes us away from superficial thinking

in which we define ourselves as beautiful or athletic or intellectual or popular or not. Instead we begin to see each other as brothers and sisters with the singular purpose of striving to become ready to return to live with our Heavenly Father. Eyes that see this way replace harsh judgment with compassion and charity, helping us change our motives so that love is at the core of what we do. Eyes that see this way help us see how to overcome the natural man, who is an enemy to God.

For the past year I have tried to recall and to notice when people act in ways that show a godly perspective. I see it all the time now. I was impressed as I watched the end of a high school basketball game last winter. It was the last varsity game of the season. Five players who had not seen much playing time were sent to check into the game. All five wanted badly for their chance to get in and score. A foul was called, stopping the clock. The referee motioned for four of the players to come in; the fifth would have to wait for the free-throw shooter to finish his shot. It was then that one young substitute player recognized that the teammate who had played least of all that season would be the one left waiting at the scorer's table. So he motioned for this teammate to go in his place. This young man who gave up his own chance to play had eyes to see. Like young Mormon, he was "quick to observe" (Mormon 1:2). He saw perhaps what he thought our Savior would have seen—that his sacrifice could lift another person.

Oh, that we could always have eyes to see others as the Savior does. I think many of our natural man tendencies would fade away. Charity would motivate our actions. We wouldn't define others by their ACT scores or their dress or their planned profession or what sins they had or had not committed or any other imperfect indicator of the worth of a daughter or a son of God.

I had an interesting experience in which I was taught this just a couple of months ago.

I took a group of students to Costa Rica as part of a tropical field biology class. I was excited to have these students with me. I have been conducting research on tropical fishes in Costa Rica for almost twenty years now. Given the many times I have been in Costa Rica, I warned my students about how to be safe. I recalled to them a time years earlier when our rental car had been broken into and several valuables had been taken. I told them what a hassle that had been and how angry and violated I had felt by that incident.

I had a great group of students with me this year. We began each day with a small devotional and a prayer, often asking Heavenly Father to watch over us. On the fourth day of our trip we arrived in a small city called Liberia, where we planned to have lunch. We parked our van in an attended lot adjacent to the town square, right across the street from a building that housed several police officers. We locked the van and asked the man attending the parking lot to keep an eye on our vehicle while we ate lunch. When we returned thirty minutes later, we found that the side window of the van had been broken and that four of our backpacks had been stolen.

I could not believe that with all of the precautions we had taken, our vehicle had been broken into again. As you can imagine, my first feeling might have again been one of anger. I knew that this meant hours in a police station and the need to replace the van, not to mention the items that were lost. Yet a remarkable thing happened to me. I had an overwhelming feeling of love come into my heart for the people who had perpetrated this crime. I could not believe what I was feeling. These impressions came to me quite strongly for several seconds. They completely changed my perspective. Rather than protecting our van, Heavenly Father was teaching me something. I wondered what circumstances had brought these people to a point in which they were acting in such desperate ways. I knew in

that moment that God loves all of His children. Those feelings were a gift to me to know how our Savior feels about us, even when we sin.

I was so proud of the students who were with me. Rather than feeling anger, they also felt compassion. They truly accepted the Savior's invitation:

Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.
[Matthew 5:44]

Having eyes to see helps us maintain a godly perspective in an earthly existence.

It is so easy, so human, to *not* love those who do harm to us or who are different from us. These differences might be physical, they might be social, or they might be economic or political or based on degree of education. At our worst we might be tempted to ignore or to marginalize or to outright reject these individuals. Yet the Savior seemed to feel particularly tender toward those who were outcast—think of lepers, of lost sheep, of publicans, of sinners. The Savior reached out to all of them.

With eyes to see, you will understand that individuals who are different from you are loved by our Heavenly Father every bit as much as He loves you. I recall serving as a ward mission leader in a large city in the Pacific Northwest. One evening I had the opportunity to take one of the full-time missionaries with me as we looked up addresses of members of the Church whose names were on our rolls but whom we had never seen at church.

One evening we knocked at a door and a man answered. His appearance shocked us. He was not dressed in a way that one would expect. We asked him if he knew where we might find a certain brother who was a member of our church, to which he replied that he was that man. At first we weren't sure if we could believe him; his appearance and lifestyle seemed so distant from our expectations. He

told us that he had served a full-time mission but that he had drifted far from activity in the Church and that he had essentially abandoned the Church and forsaken the gospel of Jesus Christ. Without much expectation we invited him to return. We told him what time and where we met on Sunday. And, to be honest, I thought that would be the end of it.

Then Sunday came, and to my great astonishment this man entered the chapel just after sacrament meeting had started. As I looked from the stand toward him, I could see that his appearance was just as it had been when we met him at his home. I could tell that he felt a bit uncomfortable as he found a seat at the back of the chapel. After the service was over I quickly raced to his side, trying to insulate him from what I worried might be awkward comments from others about how he looked. We talked for several minutes, and then he told me that he wanted to attend priesthood meeting. So I brought him in. There he was in a room full of men wearing suits and white shirts and ties. I feared that he would not be received well—his appearance and apparent lifestyle could have so easily drawn out a sense of exclusion from the men who sat in that room.

I stood and introduced him, and the response from those priesthood men will forever be burned in my heart. Almost in unison they said, “Welcome back, brother. Welcome back.”

This response prompted a feeling of love that eventually led to an earnest prayer by this good man—a prayer that Heavenly Father answered so forcefully that it led to a mighty change of heart in this man that I could scarcely have imagined.

This is a beautiful story with a wonderful ending that I wish I had time to share. But what has always stood out in my mind is how these priesthood brothers saw who this man really was, not who he appeared to be. They understood what the Lord meant when He said to Samuel:

Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature . . . : for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart. [1 Samuel 16:7]

They understood the great love that God feels for His children. President Dieter F. Uchtdorf said it so kindly in the October 2009 general conference. He said:

Think of the purest, most all-consuming love you can imagine. Now multiply that love by an infinite amount—that is the measure of God’s love for you.

God does not look on the outward appearance. I believe that He doesn’t care one bit if we live in a castle or a cottage, if we are handsome or homely, if we are famous or forgotten. Though we are incomplete, God loves us completely. Though we are imperfect, He loves us perfectly. Though we may feel lost and without compass, God’s love encompasses us completely.

He loves us because He is filled with an infinite measure of holy, pure, and indescribable love. We are important to God not because of our résumé but because we are His children. He loves every one of us, even those who are flawed, rejected, awkward, sorrowful, or broken. God’s love is so great that He loves even the proud, the selfish, the arrogant, and the wicked. [“The Love of God,” Ensign, November 2009, 22–23]

This good brother might have felt that there was no longer a place for him in the Church. But of course there was. And there is a place for each of us in the Church of Jesus Christ. To those of you who wonder whether or not you belong or who are struggling to find your place, please know that you belong. We need you. The Lord needs you.

I am so grateful for living prophets. We live in turbulent times, when many “call evil good, and good evil” (Isaiah 5:20). In His great mercy our Heavenly Father has called and bestowed keys upon prophets today. What a gift this is.

They serve as oracles to help guide us in ways that will keep us safe from evil.

It is true that they are people. I will never forget when I was a graduate student living in New England when President Gordon B. Hinckley came to speak at an area conference. We sat near the front of a great auditorium rented to accommodate the large gathering of Saints.

Before the meeting began, my oldest son, Erik, who was just three years old at the time, broke loose and ran forward toward the stage where President Hinckley was seated. As young parents, I think my wife and I were a bit embarrassed at what might happen next, fearing that Erik would end up on the stand singing and dancing. Yet as Erik approached, President Hinckley saw him coming and in the kindest way smiled at him and waved affectionately, just as any grandfather would do. Erik stopped to wave back, providing us just enough time to corner the kid.

Yes, prophets are real people, but they are much more than that. They are direct conduits to our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ. They act by authority to administer the Church as directed by Jesus Christ, whose church this is. Each of us has the privilege to gain a testimony that Jesus Christ has called prophets today. I am grateful for this direct link to heaven and that man is not left untethered but, rather, that the keys of the kingdom have been restored to the earth and that they reside with living prophets. When we have eyes to see the divine calling that prophets hold and when we act upon their words, we put ourselves in a place of spiritual safety.

Finally, and most important, how do we see Jesus Christ? Interestingly, Jesus asked His own disciples this very question:

Whom do men say that I am?

And they answered, John the Baptist: but some say, Elias; and others, One of the prophets.

And he saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Peter answereth and saith unto him, Thou art the Christ. [Mark 8:27–29]

Elder Robert D. Hales put it this way:

*Think of [it]. At [some] point in our eternal progression, each one of us is going to have to answer the question Who is Jesus Christ? We are told that every eye shall see, every ear shall hear, and every knee shall bow, every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (see Philip. 2:10–11); “When all men shall stand to be judged of him, then shall they confess that he is God” (Mosiah 27:31). [“What Think Ye of Christ?” “Whom Say Ye That I Am?” *Ensign*, May 1979, 77]*

I testify that Jesus Christ is a god. He is more than a great man who lived on the earth two thousand years ago. He is the Firstborn Son of our Heavenly Father. He is our Savior and the Redeemer of the world. He is also a Creator. The world that we live in is here for a purpose. With eyes to see, we can find evidence in our world that God loves us and that He knows us. I also testify that if we desire it and if we ask Him, He will reveal truth unto us. This truth will help guide us in our own eternal progression. He will allow us to see others for who they really are.

What a blessing it is to see each other as brothers and sisters, each of infinite worth in the eyes of God. How can we be anything but charitable and kind and merciful when we see others this way? Our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ see you this way. Of this I testify, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.