

To See as We Are Seen

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As I've envisioned this moment and considered what to share with you today, my mind has gone back to the hundreds of times I've attended events here in the de Jong Concert Hall. Thinking about those times caused me to reflect on the changes that have come into my life since I first arrived at BYU 30 years ago and reminded me that life's journey is accomplished one small step at a time. Usually I sit at the very back of this hall. If someone had told me in 1968 when I transferred to BYU that today I would be here at the front of this hall, speaking to you, I would have been incredulous. The shy, self-conscious, insecure person that I was at that time could never have imagined this moment.

Today I would like to speak to those of you who may be where I was at that time—those of you who may not yet know what you have to share with others or those who may long to become something more than you now are, something that seems very far out of reach. I want to talk about how we see ourselves and discuss some of the steps we can take to see ourselves more clearly. I believe this subject is relevant not only to those of you who are trying to discover your potential, but also to those who are seeking to move beyond past

boundaries, to chart new personal territories, and to discover more of your eternal potential.

To preface my remarks, I want to share three experiences.

The first: One cool spring day a few years ago I went to a park in Salt Lake City with some of my family. We were feeding ducks in a pond, and Benjamin, my nephew who was then 12 or 13 years old, mused aloud, "I wonder what they see. With their eyes on the sides of their heads, what do ducks see when they look out at the world?" I thought this was a very good question! I certainly couldn't answer it, and I was left wondering.

The second situation: I have a dear friend, Linda, who has been blind since birth. She leads a very dynamic life. In earlier years she was a professional singer and teacher; now she's a stay-at-home mom with five sons. One evening I was talking with Linda, telling her of a dream I had had the night before. As I described the surroundings, the people's faces, and their responses, I realized how visual my dream had been, and a question came into my

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head. I asked Linda what she sees when she dreams. She thought a moment, then replied, “I see the way I see—mostly in light and shadows.” She went on to describe what she could see at that moment: the darkness of night where she knew the window was, the bright light overhead, the shadow against the wall that she knew was the piano because she has touched it and knows its shape and knows where it is located in the room. I pressed her a little more, and she said that sometimes in her dreams she is conscious of sounds and temperature and smells. And when sight is involved, she sees the same things she sees in her daily life.

There is one more situation I’d like to share: One Sunday I attended sacrament meeting in another ward that meets in our building. I watched a sweet family a few rows in front of me. My attention was drawn to their son, Spencer, who was sitting in his wheelchair. Spencer is a very handsome boy, now 13 years old. His movements are uncoordinated and he cannot speak. His developmental level appears to be that of an infant. He has big, beautiful, clear eyes that look out on the world but seem to see nothing. As I watched his head moving from side to side and his eyes directed first here, then there, I wondered what he saw through those eyes that seemed to register no recognition.

Each of these experiences caused me to think about how we see, how we perceive. And a scripture came to my mind—Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 13:12, where he said: “For now we see through a glass, darkly.” New Testament commentaries teach us that the word translated here as *glass* actually refers to a mirror. The imagery Paul invokes in his statement may be unclear to those of us who know mirrors as the clear reflective glass we look into every day. When you try to envision what it is to look “through a glass, darkly,” perhaps you, like me, see a steam-covered bathroom mirror after a shower. But if we consider the imagery in the context of Paul’s times, the phrase “looking

through a mirror, darkly” carries powerful implications.

A mirror in Paul’s day was not made of glass but of metal, and it required constant polishing. One commentator stated that “a sponge with pounded pumice-stone was generally attached” to the mirror (Marvin R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament* [Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1887–1990 (1976 reprint)], 3:266). This allowed the user to polish the metal before use in order to remove the tarnish and more clearly see the reflection.

So often in our mortal state we view life through a tarnished metal mirror. There may be smudges here and there that obscure our vision. There may be uneven surfaces that distort the picture. Fine detail may be completely indistinguishable. When we peer at ourselves in that imperfect mirror, what do we see? What blemishes seem to be there that would disappear if our glass were more highly polished? What dimensions do we fail to see? What would we see if our mirror were perfect?

I would like to focus my remarks today on how we see ourselves and suggest that there are steps we can take to polish the glass that we now look through, darkly. We can sharpen and clarify our vision of ourselves so that an eternal perspective permeates the self-image that drives our lives. In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul adds that “when that which is perfect is come” (v. 10), we will no longer see through a glass, darkly, but we will see “face to face” (v. 12). *Now* we “know in part,” but *then* we shall know even as we are known and see as we are seen (see v. 12).

Mortality brings limitations to our ability to grasp our full potential. Neal Maxwell suggests that one reason we see “through a glass, darkly” is that the veil that separates us from our previous existence becomes “a film of forgetting that covers the memories of [our] earlier experiences” (*All These Things Shall Give Thee Experience* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book

Company, 1979], p. 9). With recollections of our premortal life blocked, we must work hard to discover our God-given gifts and talents. Each of us who has watched a child in the first few weeks of life can testify of the uniqueness of each spirit. We come to earth “trailing clouds of glory,” as William Wordsworth said (“Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood” [1807], st. 1), and each cluster of clouds, it seems, is distinct and gives the opportunity for discovery of the eternal nature of that individual.

My patriarchal blessing lists several gifts and talents that the Lord has endowed me with, then adds that I have “other gifts which [I] will discover and enjoy.” I have always been conscious of the fact that I must discover those gifts that are uniquely mine. I believe each of us has a similar quest and that as we pursue it, we are better able to define ourselves and we become more fully prepared for the journey Heavenly Father would have us follow.

To give a context for the thoughts that follow, I want to paint another picture for you now. I’d like to share with you a rough sketch of some of my personal experiences and describe how I have come to know myself better over the years.

During the early 1950s polio had reached epidemic proportions. Every summer the virus seemed to thrive, and, in spite of the best efforts to prevent its spread, thousands of children and adults fell prey to it. Researchers devoted their energies to finding a way to combat the disease. Finally, in 1954, Jonas Salk’s vaccine was available for general use. I remember receiving the injection that year when I was six years old and a few years later taking the sugar cube that contained a more stable oral vaccine. There were three strains of polio, so my parents were anxious that I receive these vaccinations even though one strain of polio had already taken its toll on me when I was only three years old.

My mother described how heartsick she felt when she saw her little three-year-old grow ill in the summer of 1951. Polio was such a dreaded disease, so Mom watched carefully when I became ill. In her heart she knew before the doctors did that this was more than a severe case of flu. That was the beginning of years of hospitalization, therapy, and surgery. Over time I learned to walk using crutches and braces, but I never had enough strength to climb stairs or pick myself up from a fall. It was safer to navigate the world in my wheelchair, though around home I used crutches most of the time. My childhood memories alternate between happy days with my family and long months in Shriners’ Hospital. Nights at the hospital were lonely with my family so far away, but the days were filled with friends and schoolwork and childhood pranks. I have some pretty good stories I could tell you!

Outside the hospital I was always very conscious of the fact that I got around differently than others. The chair was hard to ignore. One of my first struggles was over how to deal with the blatant stares of other children. When our family went shopping or sightseeing, kids would stop and stare and point and wonder out loud, “What’s wrong with her? Is she crippled?” In my immaturity I pouted and frowned over this, but my sisters found a way to help me cope. (I’m not sure I’d recommend this approach now, but it worked beautifully for us then!) Whenever a child stopped with open mouth and pointing fingers, Paula would stand on one side of me, Patsy on the other, and the three of us would stare intently at the offending child until she went running back to her mother in tears. We would laugh and go on our way, focusing on whatever we had been doing until the next child reminded us that there really was something different about our family group.

My junior high years were probably the worst. I wore metal braces on my legs, which I thought were dreadfully ugly, and the

orthopedic shoes I wore with them were terribly unfashionable. Afternoon dances in the gym were torture. (Though when I was a student here at BYU, my roommates helped me realize just how painful those afternoon dances were for everyone. They actually thought I had been lucky! At least I had a reason for being a wallflower!)

One day in my senior year in high school, I remember going down the hall at school with Mrs. Cole, my music teacher. I was in a manual wheelchair at the time, and as I pushed myself along, I couldn't keep pace with her brisk walk. As soon as she realized the problem, she stopped and said, "Oh, sorry, I forget you're in that chair!" That was the first time anyone made such a comment to me, though it has been repeated many times since. That moment stands out in my memory as the beginning of my realization that the chair was not the defining element of who I am. I realized that others could see beyond the chair and beyond my disability, to think of me as me.

Well, what can we learn from what I've just described? As I look at the process I was going through, I wonder how often, in life's circumstances, do we focus only on our weaknesses, on those areas where we fall short, where we would like to improve? Do we give equal time to our strengths? Do we look beyond the surface and seek to discover the qualities that lie latent within us, waiting to be nurtured and developed? Or do we wallow in what we are not, or what we don't have?

Neal Maxwell urges us to

make quiet but . . . honest inventories of our strengths. Most of us are dishonest bookkeepers and need confirming "outside auditors." He who in the first estate was thrust down delights in having us put ourselves down. Self-contempt is of Satan; there is none of it in heaven. We should, of course, learn from our mistakes, but without forever viewing the instant replays lest these become the game of life

itself. [Notwithstanding My Weakness (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1981), p. 10]

Remember the question my nephew Ben asked about how ducks perceive the world? How do they see? Is their world fragmented into the right-hand view and the left-hand view? Does it ever come together into one cohesive whole? I'm sure there are folks in this audience who could give us a detailed scientific explanation for this, but recently I asked my cousin Kent to describe what he knows about how birds see the world. Kent has raised exotic birds and has studied their habits extensively. He explained to me that birds have both monocular and binocular vision. With their monocular vision they can focus directly in on what they see through one eye. We've all watched a robin, head cocked to one side, peering intently at the ground, looking for her prey, then nabbing it!

But birds also have the ability to blend the vision from both eyes into one large picture. With their peripheral vision from both eyes combined, they are able to see objects directly in front of them, and, by turning their heads only slightly, they can see nearly 360 degrees around their heads. Birds use both their monocular and binocular vision, depending on the need of the moment.

What about us? As we look at ourselves, do we see only through our myopic, monocular vision? So often in my youth that is exactly what I did, focusing in on my physical problems, defining myself by my limitations, failing to turn on that wider vision and see myself in perspective. I suspect we all do that at times.

I've always loved Alma's advice to his son Corianton. In counseling his son to give up his wanton ways and return to righteousness, Alma said:

And now, my son, I desire that ye should let these things trouble you no more, and only let your sins [or perhaps we could say here, weaknesses]

trouble you, with that trouble which shall bring you down unto repentance. [Alma 42:29]

During the times in my life when I have focused too intently on my weaknesses and inadequacies, I have heard in this scripture a gentle reminder to be kind to myself. It is important to examine our weaknesses, but we must keep them in perspective and let them motivate us to stretch for better things rather than allowing them to obscure the view of our eternal potential.

In gaining a broader perspective, it is often helpful to listen to the input others give us about ourselves. What kinds of praise do you hear repeatedly? That you're fun to be around? That you listen well? That you are a loyal friend? Those who know us well will see traits that we may be blind to. Listen carefully to your parents, sisters, brothers, friends, teachers, and leaders. They can polish your mirror, then turn it back toward you, giving you a clearer reflection of your true self.

As friends and family members, it is also important that each of us give honest, insightful feedback to our loved ones. We should never be stingy with our praise but always ready to convey sincere, heartfelt compliments—as well as honest, careful critiques. Neal Maxwell's comment about making an honest inventory of our strengths mentioned the value of "outside auditors" who can see with objectivity and clarity what we ourselves might miss in our day-to-day accounting.

So my first suggestion to you for coming to know your potential more completely is to honestly assess your strengths, to listen to the feedback others give you, and to refrain from concentrating only on your weaknesses.

The context for my second suggestion requires another explanation. We have all heard faith-promoting experiences of priesthood blessings that lead to the restoration of health. One of the most memorable stories to me, which most of you have undoubtedly

heard, was told by Matthew Cowley and frequently repeated over the years. He told of being asked to bless a nine-month-old baby. As he was about to begin the blessing, the father said, "By the way, give him his vision when you give him a name. He was born blind."

Twelve years later, when Brother Cowley returned to that area, the branch president said, "Brother Cowley, the worst thing you ever did was to bless that child to receive his vision. He's the meanest kid in the neighborhood, always getting into mischief."

I've never doubted the reality of that experience, nor of hundreds of others I've heard, but for years such testimonies would leave questions tugging at my heart. Those questions had more to do with me than with the people those testimonies were about. We are taught that healing powers can be called forth when there is sufficient faith and righteousness on the part of those giving and receiving the blessing. I have received many priesthood blessings in my life, including one from President David O. McKay shortly after I became ill with polio. But I'm still in my wheelchair. No apparent miracles have occurred in my life.

I vividly remember one Sunday in the Tabernacle in Salt Lake attending the choir broadcast prior to the morning session of general conference. My friends and I visited with the gentleman seated beside us. He was curious about my situation and asked a few questions. Then, just before the broadcast began, he leaned over, looked me straight in the eyes, and said, "You know, if you had enough faith you could walk!"

I was speechless. After all, that was the very thought that had plagued me for so many years. Whenever I heard those Matthew Cowley stories, I was left with haunting questions about my own faith. It was easy to conclude that if the outcome of priesthood blessings is based on the faith of those participating, and if the person giving the blessing is a prophet of the Lord who surely does not lack

faith, there is only one other factor in the equation. And the nagging thought persisted that if only I had sufficient faith I could be healed.

For months after the incident in the Tabernacle I pondered and prayed over the question. One day as I was reading my patriarchal blessing, my mind returned to the priesthood blessing I received from David O. McKay. My mother repeatedly told me that in the blessing, President McKay had not promised me a full recovery. His words were simply, “Your limbs will be restored so that you can lead a useful and happy life.” I should add that at that time, I was able only to turn my head from side to side and weakly wiggle the fingers on my left hand. In recent years doctors have expressed amazement that I am able to do as much as I do, given the extent of neurological damage I experienced.

That day when I was thinking about the literal fulfillment of President McKay’s blessing and puzzling over what the man in the Tabernacle had said, I was drawn to a statement in my patriarchal blessing that clearly defines my mission in life. For the first time I realized that my specific mission can best be fulfilled sitting in a wheelchair rather than walking around every day. I had always believed that restoration of health was completely dependent on faith. I finally began to realize that lack of faith is not the reason I still use my wheelchair. What I understood that day is that the Lord’s will is another vital element in the equation. No matter how much faith we exercise, no matter how righteously we are trying to live, the Lord may have reasons for withholding his healing power or for withholding whatever it is we are pleading for. There may be purposes beyond our understanding that can be accomplished only by going through an experience rather than by going around it, by enduring it rather than having that cup pass from us.

Like my friend Linda who sees “darkly” through her natural lenses but who uses her

other senses in creative ways to compensate for her lack of sight, we, too, must recognize that limitations may prevent us from experiencing everything in life. There may be some things we cannot do, some things we cannot give. But we must also recognize that when we are weak in one area, we will likely find compensation in another. Though my physical well-being has been less than whole since I was three years old, I have been blessed with everything I need to fulfill the purpose for which I’ve been sent to earth. It is my responsibility to discover where my strengths lie and develop them in such a way that my weaknesses are minimized.

In Ether 12:25, Moroni confided in the Lord his fear that the Gentiles would mock his writings because they were less polished than his spoken words. The Lord replied:

My grace is sufficient . . . that they shall take no advantage of your weakness;

. . . I give unto men weakness that they may be humble; and . . . if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them. [Ether 12:26–27]

I have a deep and abiding testimony that as we endure challenges and push through our weaknesses, our spiritual muscles or character muscles grow dramatically stronger. Our tailor-made trials provide a customized cross for each of us to bear, and it is through those trials that we gain the strength to make our most enduring contributions.

The second suggestion, then, for seeing yourself more clearly is to look deeply into your experiences in an effort to discover how you can compensate for the weaknesses and challenges that are certain to be a part of your mortal experience. Read your patriarchal blessing for understanding. “Search, ponder, and pray” for understanding of your trials (*Songbook*, 1995, p. 109). Carefully examine the strengths you develop as you compensate for specific weaknesses. They may help you understand where

you should focus your energies in order to fulfill the mission that only you can accomplish.

Finally, I want to return to Spencer, the young boy whose eyes register no recognition of the objects or the people around him. Recently I spoke with his mother, who told me that he has what is called lissencephaly, or smooth brain syndrome. His brain never formed the folds and convolutions that characterize a properly developed brain. He functions at the level of a six-month-old infant. In answer to my question about what he sees, his mother said that doctors assume his eyes and optical nerve function normally in a physiological sense, or at least they once did. But because his brain never developed, his cortex cannot process what he sees, and so he is diagnosed as cortically blind.

Is there an analogy here for our experiences? Do our eyes ever take in data but fail to properly process it? Maybe our physical eyes are not limited, like Spencer's, but what about our spiritual eyes? The Savior himself said of those who did not understand the meaning of his parables, "Because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not" (Matthew 13:13).

A powerful example of how, through the Spirit, our eyes may be opened to broader views is recorded in the Old Testament. In 2 Kings 6 we read that when the king of Syria learned that Elisha's prophetic powers were the reason Syrian soldiers continually lost battles against Israel, he sent a large army to destroy Elisha. The scriptures tell us that at night a great host of Syrian horses and chariots surrounded the city where Elisha lived.

Elisha's servant rose early the next morning, saw the vast army surrounding the city, and said to his master, "Alas, what shall we do?"

Elisha's response in verse 16 was meant to be reassuring. He said, "Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them." Apparently, though, his servant was not reassured, so Elisha prayed, "Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the Lord

opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha" (v. 17). Only when his eyes were opened was this young man able to perceive the spiritual hosts who were there to assist them.

One quick aside—I find the outcome of this story fascinating in light of our theme today. The Lord temporarily cursed the Syrian army with blindness to allow Elisha to overpower them. Elisha then led the Syrians into captivity, restored their sight, instructed the king of Israel to feed them, then finally released them to return to their own king. All this was done to demonstrate the Lord's power to them. The last sentence in verse 23 tells us that "the bands of Syria came no more into the land of Israel." It seems we could build another entire talk around this verse.

I would like to return to the point illustrated in the scripture about Elisha and his young servant. Can our eyes be opened to see in a spiritual sense? As we allow the Spirit into our lives, is it possible for us to perceive a dimension of reality that is invisible to the natural eye? This may be a very simplistic analogy, but what comes to my mind here are the visual puzzles that have become popular in the last several years. Undoubtedly many of you know what I'm referring to. When you casually glance at one of these puzzles you see a picture or pattern of some sort. But when you allow your focus to alter slightly, there's a momentary sensation of hovering on the brink of seeing something more, and a bit of depth begins to emerge. Then, suddenly, three dimensions appear, and you see an entirely new picture. At times it's hard to hold onto the new image—at least for me that's true. And it usually takes me a long time to find the depth. But with a little practice it becomes easier to see multiple dimensions and to see them more rapidly.

Do you suppose this is how it might be as we come to know ourselves more fully? We gaze at the mirror images that reflect who we are, and

at first we see only the surface—perhaps we focus on our flaws and imperfections. But as the eyes of our understanding open, we begin to see in a different plane. As we allow the Spirit to adjust our focus, the picture we have of ourselves takes on new dimensions. We begin to catch glimpses of our eternal nature and to see ourselves as we are seen by our Father in Heaven.

But how do we do this? How can we make this become a reality in our lives? I believe that the first step is to pray that our eyes will be opened. Then when we discover those new dimensions within ourselves, we must create opportunities for testing our newfound abilities.

I vividly recall days when, professionally, I was so unsure of myself that I did not have the courage to speak out in even the smallest, most friendly meetings or classroom settings. I had no confidence in my ability to contribute to the ideas under discussion. Somewhere along the line I began to realize that I did have good ideas and that if I didn't share them, no one else would. And as I shared one idea, other ideas evolved. From there I eventually recognized that teaching what I had learned was highly satisfying. And I decided that more education would give me the chance to share in new ways and in broader circles. Those additional educational opportunities opened even more doors through which I have glimpsed new paths I want to follow. I imagine this process will continue eternally; at least I hope it will! I expect that many of you could share similar tales of self-discovery and progress.

When the Savior appeared to the Nephites, he taught, "I would that ye should be perfect even as I, or your Father who is in heaven is perfect" (3 Nephi 12:48). In footnote *b* of Matthew 5:48 we are told that the Greek word translated as *perfect* means "complete, finished, fully developed." C. S. Lewis wrote that the command to be perfect "is not idealistic gas." He added that if we will let him, God

will make the feeblest and filthiest of us into a god or goddess, a dazzling, radiant, immortal creature, pulsating all through with such energy and joy and wisdom and love as we cannot now imagine, a bright stainless mirror which reflects back to God . . . His own boundless power and delight and goodness. [Mere Christianity (New York: Touchstone, 1996), p. 176]

I would like to summarize by reading again from 1 Corinthians 13, this time beginning in verse 9:

For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come [meaning, perhaps, when the Savior comes; or, perhaps, when we are perfected], then that which is in part shall be done away. [We will then have the fullness available to us.]

When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. [Think of this sentence in eternal terms. When I was a mortal, I thought and understood as a mortal, but when I eventually become an eternal being and the veil is removed, then I will put away mortal limitations.]

For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then [we shall see] face to face: now [we] know [ourselves] in part; but then shall [we] know [ourselves] even as [we are] known. [1 Corinthians 13:9–12]

Our awareness of our individual eternal nature will gradually unfold to our view as we focus on our strengths, listen to the feedback of our loved ones, find ways to compensate for our weaknesses, ponder and pray over our experiences, and invite the spirit of understanding into our lives. I pray that we will each seek to increase that awareness, that we will be bold enough to give ourselves new experiences through which we can test our newly discovered talents and abilities, and that we will continually seek Heavenly Father's help in

moving toward the potential he already sees within us.

I know that our Father lives. I know that he loves each of us with a tender father's love. I know that he desires that we each return to him.

The Doctrine and Covenants tells us that celestial glory is where "God, even the Father,

reigns upon his throne forever and ever" and that those who dwell there with him "see as they are seen, and know as they are known" (D&C 76:92, 94). I pray that we may each find our way to that glory, where we will see ourselves and our loved ones as our Father now sees us. This is my prayer in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.