



OCTOBER 2026 GENERAL CONFERENCE · SATURDAY MORNING SESSION

The Sculpting of Our Souls

Sister Tamara W. Runia · First Counselor in the Young Women General Presidency

Words to remember

- *“Let’s choose Christ, who can heal the wounds of this world while carving out room for joy!”*
- *“Consider this: Christ’s work in your life and His love for you are bigger than your present story. And He can fix what feels badly broken.”*

In Sister Tamara W. Runia’s own words, from the talk.

Sister Tamara W. Runia, First Counselor in the Young Women General Presidency, began with a confession: she loves fixing things. Knots, tangled necklaces, stains (she has been called “the stain whisperer”). It’s human nature, she said, to want to fix things and to become frustrated when something comes along that we cannot fix.

Then she told of the thing she could not fix. Thirteen years ago, her oldest son, Ryan, woke on a Monday morning, kissed his wife and four young children goodbye, and left for work. A few hours later he collapsed and died from an undetected heart condition. “His heart simply stopped.” The next day was his two-year-old daughter Piper’s birthday. As the family lit candles and sang, Piper looked for her dad, and Sister Runia realized this was something she would never be able to fix.

The scripture that changed the lens through which I view my life comes from Liberty Jail. Joseph Smith pleaded for a reprieve, and was told instead, “All these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good” (D&C 122:7). “God’s answer implies that experience is valuable, and I’m learning the only way to get it is to go through it. Can’t we skip over it? Is there some other way? No, there isn’t another way.” It is as though we studied these lessons in a premortal classroom and are now living them in this laboratory of life. This is where we put on Christ. She quoted C. S. Lewis: “God intends to give us what we need, not what we now think we want.”

She asked the question many of us ask: how can a loving Father watch us go through heartbreaking experiences? Part of her surprise, she said, came from growing up with promises like “If you keep the commandments, you’ll be blessed.” Those are true promises. But the gospel had felt like an umbrella held overhead to keep the rain off. “But I’ve learned from experience that we’re all going to get rained on. And sometimes we’re going to get pelted!” She taught, “The gospel isn’t the umbrella; it’s the solid rock we’re standing on during the storm—that ‘sure foundation ... whereon if men build they cannot fall.’” (Helaman 5:12)

When the angel asked Nephi, “Knowest thou the condescension of God?” he answered, “I know that he loveth his children; nevertheless, I do not know the meaning of all things” (1 Nephi 11:16–17). God’s love has moved Sister Runia from questions that begin with why to reflections that begin, “I know that God loves me, so what is supposed to be happening here?” It is precisely because He loves us that we have tempering, refining experiences. A godlike life is carved from the very things that make it hard, including the painful things that happen and the righteous desires that haven’t. From outside, a life in that process may look like it’s unraveling. But “God is shaping us into something only He knows we can become.”

At Ryan’s funeral she looked at his wife, Carrie, and their four children and said, “I don’t understand why this happened.” Then: “Not understanding is not the same as not believing.” She absolutely believes God sees you, loves you, and knows your story, a story that is both personal (so we needn’t look sideways and compare) and purposeful. Our suffering “It’s not a detour from the path; it gives purpose to our path.”

Ryan’s oldest son, seven-year-old Jack, gave a Primary talk at the funeral that he and his dad had prepared. He lays out Lego pieces and follows the instructions, just as Heavenly Father’s plan guides us so we can build hard things. Carrie asked what he would do with only the instructions and no picture on the box. “Yes, because you can trust the one who designed it, and it always turns out.” For anyone who has had to surrender the story they thought their life would tell, she acknowledged, “That sting is real, and that wound is wide.” It takes our finest faith to keep assembling the pieces that make sense and the ones that don’t. “Consider this: Christ’s work in your life and His love for you are bigger than your present story. And He can fix what feels badly broken.”

The day before he died, Ryan was set apart as elders quorum president and visited a neighbor whose wife and children had just left. He told him, “Brother, you have a choice right now, and it’s a big one. You can curse God and blame Him, or you can turn to Him and let Him heal you.” Sister Runia applied it to all of us: “Let’s choose Christ, who can heal the wounds of this world while carving out room for joy!” God is saying “Trust me,” and we are learning to say yes. She described a sort of divine mending that changes what’s happening to you into something happening for you.

Her final image came from her brother Kent’s college sculpting class. The assignment was a clay bust of himself. The eyes were terrible, and though the instructor was helping others, Kent wanted it to be his own piece. After struggling alone, he humbled himself and asked. The instructor carved so aggressively and abruptly that it startled me, digging deeper than Kent had dared, and within minutes the eyes came to life. It was still uniquely me, yet a master’s hand had shaped what mine could not.

So it is with our souls. Inviting the Savior in is hard; pride gets in the way. He lovingly chastens us to get our attention, but waits for an invitation before he can really go to work. Sometimes His carving feels abrupt. In time we see the work of His hand. One day, when the suffering and loneliness have ended, we will look into the mirror of our souls, “stand all amazed” and thank Him for all of it. The

molding, the shaping, the pain and adversity that helped us become more like him. For we shall see him as he is, and we shall be like him (1 John 3:2).

Let's talk about it

What did this talk teach us about the Savior? What is one small thing our family can do this week?

Kid-friendly summary in our own words · Read or watch the full talk: [churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2026/10/13runia](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2026/10/13runia)