

# Finding Peace in IMPERFECTION

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One of the misperceptions that we may struggle with during this earth life has to do with the concept of perfection. Many falsely believe that we must achieve perfection in this life in order to be saved or exalted.

As a therapist, I was once in a meeting with a woman when she burst into tears. She said, “How can I ever be good enough?” She went on to talk about how unworthy she was. As we explored her feelings, no great sin emerged from her past or present. She just felt she wasn’t good enough. She compared herself to neighbors, friends, and relatives, and everyone that she could recall was “better,” in her mind, than she was.

## Thoughts Become Our Reality

I know that there are many who have had feelings of imperfection and insecurity, whether in a calling, as a

parent, or just in general. These feelings can cause us to hide our talents and hold back from others or feel discouragement, anxiety, or depression. Our thoughts about ourselves significantly influence our behaviors and feelings. Many of us say things to ourselves that we would never say to another person. This, in turn, holds us back from our true potential and diminishes our abilities and talents. President Ezra Taft Benson (1899–1994) said, “Satan is increasingly striving to overcome the Saints with despair, discouragement, despondency, and depression.”<sup>1</sup>

Fortunately, “the only opinion of us that matters is what our Heavenly Father thinks of us,” taught Elder J. Devn Cornish of the Seventy. “Please sincerely ask Him what He thinks of you. He will love and correct but never discourage us; that is Satan’s trick.”<sup>2</sup>

**To expect only perfection now would mean denying ourselves the opportunity for growth.**

## Imperfection Is an Opportunity

We are on earth to have joy, and part of that joy is what we create, what we believe, and what we accept. If we accept that we are flawed children of God who are learning as we go, we can accept our imperfections. Expecting immediate perfection would mean denying us the opportunity for growth. We would be



denying the gift of repentance and the power of Jesus Christ and His Atonement in our lives. Elder Bruce R. McConkie (1915–85) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said: “There was only one perfect being, the Lord Jesus. If men [and women] had to be perfect and live all of the law strictly, wholly, and completely, there would be only one saved person in eternity. The prophet [Joseph Smith] taught that there are many things to be done, even beyond the grave, in working out our salvation.”<sup>3</sup> Our very imperfections may be a way through which God is preparing us to return to Him.

### **Weaknesses Can Become Strengths**

Turning to our Heavenly Father in imperfection requires humility. This process is described in Ether: “If men come unto me I will show unto them their weakness. I give unto men weakness that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me; for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them” (Ether 12:27). When we are humble, our Father in Heaven will open His arms to us and help us learn from our weaknesses. An example of this is in the New Testament. As Paul struggled with the “thorn in [his] flesh,” he learned that this weakness had humbled him and brought him closer to God (see 2 Corinthians 12:7).

This humility and willingness to learn is exactly what we must apply to our own imperfections. We must learn from these weaknesses so they can become strengths.

There is also a difference between being humbled and feeling of little worth or value. Humility draws us closer to the Lord, while shame and guilt can drive us away from the Lord. God does not want us to denigrate ourselves and feel that we have little worth in His eyes. This is hurtful to Him and to us. It’s important to recognize that we are worth the time and effort it takes to change. Part of what this earth life is about is finding ways to change our weaknesses. Some weaknesses may be lifelong battles, while others can be overcome more quickly.

Several years ago I worked with a client, Rachel (name has been changed), who had a problem with drinking. It had become a crutch and a means to release the stress of her difficult life. She determined that she was going to overcome her addiction, and with some help and encouragement, she stopped drinking. Before fully overcoming her drinking problem, she didn’t belittle herself for her weakness. She recognized it. Then, with determination and the help of a good bishop, the Lord, and a few key people, Rachel determined that she would stop drinking. Last time I spoke with her, she reported no desire to drink.

In order to grow from our weaknesses, we must turn to the Lord with faith, hope, and an understanding that He will hold us in the palm of His hand. President Russell M. Nelson, President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, has counseled: “To the individual who is weak in the heart, fearful in the heart, be patient with yourself. Perfection comes not in this life but in the next life. Don’t demand things that are unreasonable. But demand of yourself improvement. As you let the Lord help you through that, He will make the difference.”<sup>4</sup>

### **Choose Happiness Now**

In the midst of becoming better, we can choose peace and happiness now. Even in the midst of the darkest circumstances we can choose our attitude. Viktor Frankl, a well-known psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor, stated, “Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of human freedoms—to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way.”<sup>5</sup>

We are told, “Men are, that they might have joy” (2 Nephi 2:25). This does not mean that God will magically fill our lives with happiness. Happiness is a choice for most of us. It takes effort and the practice of gratitude, trust, and faith. The negative can take all the room in our lives if we allow it. We may not be able to change the circumstances in our lives, but we can choose

how we react to them. President Thomas S. Monson said, “We can’t direct the wind, but we can adjust the sails. For maximum happiness, peace, and contentment, may we *choose* a positive attitude.”<sup>6</sup>

As we choose to focus on the good, rely on the Lord and His Atonement, and accept and learn from our imperfections, we can remove unrealistic

expectations of ourselves and strive for goodness and happiness in our lives. We will be at peace with our imperfections and find comfort in God’s redeeming love. We will find joy in our hearts knowing that the plan of salvation can lead us back to our Heavenly Father as we make our best efforts, imperfect as they are, to be worthy to live with Him again. ■

#### NOTES

1. Ezra Taft Benson, “Do Not Despair,” *Ensign*, Oct. 1986, 4.
2. J. Devn Cornish, “Am I Good Enough? Will I Make It?” *Ensign*, Nov. 2016, 33.
3. Bruce R. McConkie, “The Seven Deadly Heresies” (Brigham Young University devotional, June 1, 1980), 6–7, [speeches.byu.edu](http://speeches.byu.edu).
4. Russell M. Nelson, “Men’s Hearts Shall Fail Them” (video), [mormonchannel.org](http://mormonchannel.org).
5. Viktor E. Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning* (1959), 86.
6. Thomas S. Monson, “Living the Abundant Life,” *Ensign*, Jan. 2012, 4.



*Of choosing how to react to challenges, President Thomas S. Monson said, “We can’t direct the wind, but we can adjust the sails.”*