

A Better Way to Measure Myself

By Heather J. Johnson

Throughout my time as a missionary, I struggled with questions like these: “Am I doing enough?” “Am I doing all of the specific things God wants me to accomplish as a missionary?” I worried that despite my working hard and striving to be obedient, my imperfections and mistakes made my sacrifice in serving not as acceptable as it might have been. I especially worried about leaving things undone—even if I didn’t know exactly what those things were.

Even after my release, I kept worrying about these questions. Six weeks after returning home, I read an article by Elder Brent H. Nielson of the Seventy called “Can We Live ‘after the Manner of Happiness?’” In it he tells of interviewing a missionary who was worried about mistakes he had already repented of. Elder Nielson asked the missionary, “Why do you want to pay for your sins when the Savior has already paid for them?”¹

I realized that by beating myself up over my perceived shortcomings, I was trying to pay for them myself. What’s more, some of the expectations I was holding myself to were of my own making and not God’s.

I could almost hear the Savior asking me, “Why are you trying to pay for your mistakes? I suffered so you wouldn’t have to. When I sent you on a mission, I knew you would make mistakes. But you don’t have to be condemned by those mistakes. Because of my Atonement, you can repent. And you have repented. Move on and remember your time as a missionary with joy.”

Moving on is a process that I’m still working on, but as I’ve tried to apply this direction I’ve been happier, less anxious, and more focused on the future rather than the unchangeable past. Imagine how much better off I would have been if I’d gone into the mission field with more of

an attitude of trust in Christ’s ability to make things right. I wouldn’t have wasted as much time with unnecessary guilt. I would have seen my mistakes and shortcomings as opportunities to repent and learn. We should never purposefully sin or make mistakes, but neither should we be so fearful of imperfection that we give up or wallow in guilt.

We’re often told to just do our best and then not worry. This advice isn’t particularly helpful to people who feel the weight of falling short of perfection. “Our best” is always out of reach to those of us who are sure we could do better. I’ve found I can better measure my efforts when I ask myself questions like these:

1. Am I making choices that strengthen my faith in Jesus Christ and His Atonement?
2. Am I committed to keeping my covenants (even though my efforts are imperfect)?
3. Am I repenting daily?
4. Am I learning how to better recognize the promptings of the Holy Ghost and follow them?
5. Am I joyfully enduring to the end or have I given up trying?

I was focused on my mistakes and convinced I hadn't lived up to God's expectations.

Pondering my answers to questions like these helps me determine my spiritual direction, not just my location on the path. Elder Dale G. Renlund of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught, "Our absolute distance from Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ is important, but the direction we are heading is even more crucial."² If we can answer yes to these questions, we are on the right track. We can press forward diligently, joyfully, and faithfully.

Often when I ask myself one of these questions, my response is something like, "Well, I'm trying, but it's really hard, and I don't know if I'm doing very well." At those times I take comfort in what Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostle taught: "The great thing about the gospel is we get credit for *trying*, even if we don't always succeed."³ Sincerely trying to live the gospel is living the gospel.

As we live the gospel, Jesus Christ enables us to do things we could not do on our own.

We can go on missions, take challenging classes, explore our hidden talents, and take on new opportunities with confidence in our Savior and His ability to help us, forgive us, and make things right. ■

The author lives in Idaho, USA.

NOTES

1. Brent H. Nielson, "Can We Live 'after the Manner of Happiness?'" *Ensign*, Sept. 2016, 66.
2. Dale G. Renlund, "That I Might Draw All Men unto Me," *Ensign*, May 2016, 40.
3. Jeffrey R. Holland, "Tomorrow the Lord Will Do Wonders among You," *Ensign*, May 2016, 125–26.