

TO

BY AMANDA DIERENFELDT

Growing up, I was always inclined to perfectionism. So when I received my patriarchal blessing, one admonition in particular seemed natural: to complete the tasks I was given “to the best of [my] ability, to perfection.” Only later would I start to realize how little I understood perfection—or the role of grace.

In 1998 I returned home early from a mission due to health problems. I felt a tremendous amount of guilt because I felt I had not completed my mission “to perfection.” Added to this sense of failure was uncertainty about my illness. So far, doctors had been unable to diagnose it.

In spite of my health challenges, I knew I needed to move forward, so I enrolled in a university to continue my education. After only two quarters, however, I returned home again, in pain, for urgent surgery. It was at this point that doctors discovered I had an autoimmune disease.

While I was recovering from surgery, I began working part-time at the chocolate store where I had been employed as a teenager. Even though I was doing what I could, I didn't feel that I was pursuing anything worthwhile, much less completing it “to perfection.” I began to compare myself to others, especially to my friends who were completing their college degrees, serving missions, or starting families. I felt left behind.

Then I met Stephanie. She came into the candy store one day wearing a black scarf around her head. As I pointed out to her my favorite chocolate, I felt impressed to inquire about her situation. She smiled, removed her scarf, and, pointing to her bald head, told me she was going through chemotherapy. That exchange was the start of a special and candid friendship.

Stephanie came by the store regularly to enjoy a treat and talk about life. I learned that she was a member of the Church and that she had struggled spiritually as well as physically. She told me about some rebellious choices she had made and about her efforts to repent. She was working toward being sealed to her husband in the temple.

One day I shared some of my own challenges. I confided in her how discouraged I was by my circumstances. “I am scooping the same ice cream I scooped in high school,” I explained. “I didn't complete my mission or college, and I don't know what to do now.”

Stephanie responded, “Why do you have to finish the race of life in a set time? Why not just run the race?”

For the first time, I realized that the efforts I was making were my best, and my best was enough. The Savior loved me, and His grace, through His Atonement, was sufficient for me, for my deficiencies. Although I felt I had been looking to Him all along, until Stephanie shared her insight with me, I had somehow missed an important lesson about His role in my life.

Ether 12:27 says, “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.” As I have been able to humble myself and have faith in the Lord, I have seen over and over again that He does indeed make weak things become strong. My increased testimony of this truth has helped me face my challenges with greater faith and hope.

A few months after that conversation, I left my hometown to start a new job and lost contact with my friend. One day my mom called to tell me that she had seen Stephanie's obituary in the newspaper. I came home to attend her funeral and learned she had been sealed to her husband just three weeks before her death.

My heart sighed with gratitude for having had Stephanie in my life and for what she taught me about running a perfect race. I don't always need to sprint. Occasionally, it will be all I can do to simply face the finish line. Doing our best to move forward—no matter what speed “our best” is—is OK. Our efforts can be made perfect because the Lord's grace is sufficient for us all (see Moroni 10:32). ■

PERFECTION

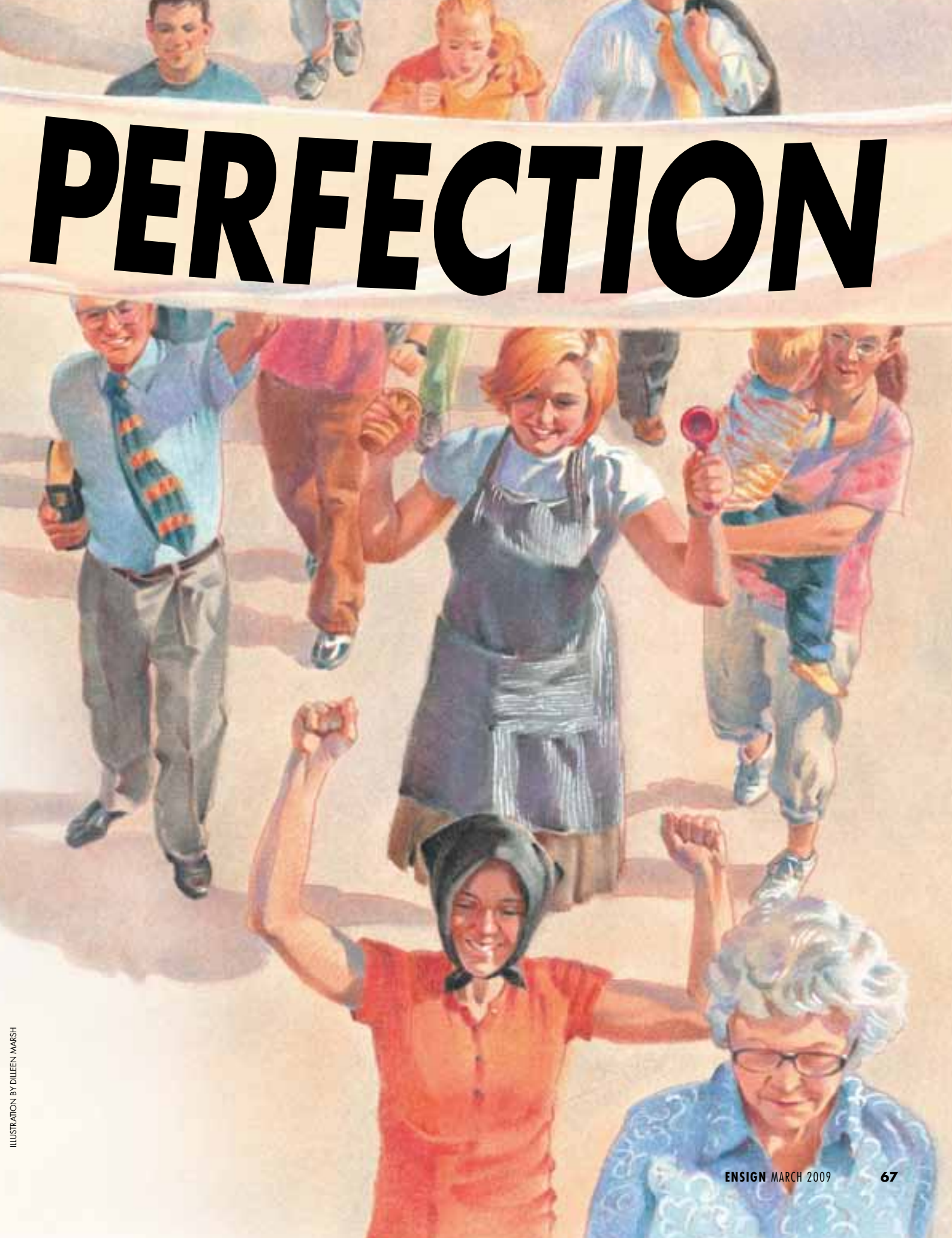


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