

# *What It Means to Pursue* **Perfection**

We try so hard to be perfect,  
when really we should just be  
doing the best we can.

**By Kathryn Grover**

**O**ne morning I took a day off from work and slept in. I woke up without an alarm, made myself a fruit parfait, and started on some homework. When it was almost time for me to go to class, I put on my makeup, got dressed, and fixed my hair. As I looked in the mirror while brushing my teeth, I thought, “Wow! What a perfect morning. I got enough sleep, I’ve gotten everything done that I needed to, and my hair looks great!” Right at that moment, I opened my mouth to adjust my toothbrush, and *BAM*—toothpaste drool dribbled all the way down my black shirt. Perfection ruined.

I quickly cleaned the toothpaste off my shirt and walked to class only slightly damp. “It’s fine, it’s fine—today is still going to



PHOTOGRAPH INSIDE THE ROME ITALY TEMPLE VISITORS CENTER BY MASSIMO CRISCIONE. POSED BY MODEL



be great," I told myself. When I got to class, however, I was asked to say the opening prayer. I stood up in front of everyone and was about to pray, when I looked down and realized that my quick cleanup was far from perfect. There were white toothpaste drool stains running all down my shirt. "Welp . . . there goes my perfect day," I thought.

### **Pressures of Perfection**

Every day we are faced with the constant pressure to be perfect. This can stem from a variety of sources, including photoshopped ads, flawless photos on Instagram, or the class rankings listed next to our grades in school. Or it can even have a religious basis, stemming from the need to have a perfect testimony or a perfect marriage and family. I mean, Jesus Christ even commands in Matthew 5:48, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." And reading that can be super overwhelming if not properly understood. It may lead many of us to think, "I'm not good enough" or "I'll never succeed." This phenomenon is known as perfectionism.

Perfectionism "refers to an inner desire or the longing to establish and achieve higher standards and successes."<sup>1</sup> Although it's good to have high standards, thinking we must achieve perfection now can cause certain implications in our lives. In a recent research study on perfectionism in the area of academics, one conclusion was that "in addition to causing depression, perfectionism can also lead to negative traits such as narcissism, Machiavellianism, psychopathy, aggression, and poor social relationships that lead to the lack of prosocial behavior."<sup>2</sup> Surely, Christ did not mean for us to invite these negative thoughts and effects of perfectionism into our lives.



In trying to steadily improve, we can find motivation and direction by focusing on Christ as our example.

### **Perfection Is Pending**

Interestingly, the scripture footnote for the word *perfect* provides an alternative Greek translation: "complete, finished, fully developed" (Matthew 5:48, footnote *b*). Thankfully our knowledge of the plan of salvation teaches us that we are not and cannot be fully developed in this mortal life. President Russell M. Nelson stated in the October 1995 general conference: "We need not be dismayed if our earnest efforts toward perfection now seem so arduous and endless. Perfection is pending. It can come in full only after the Resurrection and only through the Lord."<sup>3</sup>

President Nelson's statement reaffirms what the Savior said to the Pharisees when they warned Him to depart before Herod killed Him.

Jesus told them: “Tell that fox, Behold, I cast out devils, and I do cures to day and to morrow, and the third day I shall be perfected” (Luke 13:32). Although Christ was perfect—or sinless—in mortality, this passage suggests that resurrection would bring an additional aspect of perfection. With a glorified, resurrected body, Jesus would be perfect, like His Father (see 3 Nephi 12:48).

If perfection is not achieved in full until after we are resurrected, it can be easy for us to think we can just give up on being perfect now and wait until after the day of resurrection comes. But that shouldn't be our approach either. We can always try to do a little better.

In trying to steadily improve, we can find motivation and direction by focusing on Christ as our example. However, as young adults, we may wonder what that means, when the majority of what we read about concerning Christ's life took place when He was in His 30s. There is one verse in the entirety of the Bible that describes what Christ did during what might be considered his young adult years: “And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man” (Luke 2:52). He simply increased. By following His example, we should also strive to increase in wisdom, stature, and favor with God and man. This may include studying our scriptures more, taking an extra class, going to the temple more often, or even reaching out to someone sitting alone at lunch.

Elder Neal A. Maxwell (1926–2004) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles stated: “Our perfect Father does not expect us to be perfect children yet. He had only one such Child. Meanwhile, therefore, sometimes with smudges on our cheeks, dirt on our hands, and shoes untied, stammeringly but smilingly we present God with a dandelion—as if it were an orchid

or a rose! If for now the dandelion is the best we have to offer, He receives it, knowing what we may later place on the altar. It is good to remember how young we are spiritually.”<sup>4</sup> Keeping this in perspective helps us remember that God recognizes every ounce of effort we put into trying to become like Him and His Son.

We all mess up. We all fail. We might all even spill toothpaste on our shirts. However, this mortal life, thankfully, is not the end. I am eternally grateful for God's perfect plan and perfect Son. He provides a way for us to return to Him in a fully developed, completed, perfected state. All that matters is that we try a little harder to be a little better every single day. ■



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#### NOTES

1. Muhammad Ibrahim and Cathy Sofhieanty Syamsuri, “Academic Perfectionism among Adolescents: A Qualitative Study,” *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research*, vol. 139 (July 2018), 116, [atlantis-pub.com/proceedings/uipsur-17/25899595](http://atlantis-pub.com/proceedings/uipsur-17/25899595).
2. Ibrahim and Syamsuri, “Academic Perfectionism among Adolescents,” 116.
3. Russell M. Nelson, “Perfection Pending,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 88.
4. Neal A. Maxwell, *That Ye May Believe* (1992), 100.



#### CONTINUE IN PATIENCE

“Let us do the best we can and try to improve each day. When our imperfections appear, we can keep trying to correct them. We can be more forgiving of flaws

in ourselves and among those we love. We can be comforted and forbearing. The Lord taught, ‘Ye are not able to abide the presence of God now . . . ; wherefore, continue in patience until ye are perfected’ [Doctrine and Covenants 67:13].”

“. . . [Perfection] awaits all who love [the Lord] and keep his commandments. It includes thrones, kingdoms, principalities, powers, and dominions. It is the end for which we are to endure. It is the eternal perfection that God has in store for each of us.”

Russell M. Nelson, “Perfection Pending,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 88.