

IMPROVEMENT

NOW,

PERFECTION

LATER

When it comes to goal setting,  
feel free to take a deep breath.  
You're still a work in progress!

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Church Magazines

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**“THIS YEAR, I RESOLVE** to eat my favorite candy at least once a week, and to binge-watch entire TV series no longer than five days after they’re released!”

Do those sound like New Year’s resolutions you’d feel confident you could achieve? Perhaps. But they’re also not exactly the kind of goals that help you grow.



Goals can be tricky. For some, goal setting is a rewarding process that leads to positive change. For others, the act becomes a guilt trip around the first of February, if not sooner, as lofty New Year’s resolutions aren’t close to being on track.

And for still others, the notion of creating goals at all—in January or any other time—is enough to send them scrambling for cover. Why is it that goal setting can be motivating for some but feel hard or scary for others?

With the Children and Youth program launching this month in the Church, it’s worth taking a fresh look at how to pursue personal improvement “in a way that doesn’t include getting ulcers or anorexia, feeling depressed or demolishing our self-esteem,” as Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has taught.<sup>1</sup>

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## TAKE THE TIME

If you need a recipe for anything from triple-chocolate cookies to broccoli ice cream (yup, it exists), you can find one in seconds with a phone or computer.

But how long does it take to replace a quick temper with Christlike patience?

How long to master a musical instrument or learn a language? To train for a long-distance hike or bike ride? How long to finally forgive someone who’s hurt you—or to forgive yourself?



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In a day of instant answers to many questions, it can be hard to accept that certain things take more time to unfold. In some cases, a lifetime. So for starters, when you look at improving your life in any meaningful way, please give yourself some *real time* to get there. Hitting the gas too quickly often ends in discouragement.



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## A LITTLE BETTER EACH DAY

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Another trap we can each fall into is a tendency to try and take on too much at once. There's nothing wrong with setting your sights high, but should your very first running event really be a marathon? Very likely not. You'll most often have better results by first training for a 5K, then a 10K, and so forth.

The same approach works with spiritual goals. You can choose to work at gradual, consistent gains in anything from temple attendance to understanding Isaiah. Along the way, remember to be patient with yourself. As you pray for guidance and follow promptings from the Spirit, Heavenly Father will help you know what the next steps need to be in your progression.

President Russell M. Nelson has taught: "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."<sup>2</sup>

As another consideration, gradual improvement in the right direction is infinitely better than any speed in the wrong direction.

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## YOU DO YOU

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Whatever your goals, they should only reflect your hopes for a better you, not a better version of you as compared to someone else.

For example, striving to raise your grade point average is a great goal. But trying to raise it so that it's higher than your sister's? Not a great goal. In fact, not even a good goal. Comparisons are often a recipe for misery.

This trap of comparing yourself to others in goal setting can creep into matters that aren't as obviously competitive, such as the goal to make a varsity sports team.

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Think about that for a second. In order to make varsity, don't you have to play *better* than all the other people who tried and didn't make it? Ultimately, you have no control over how prepared or skilled the others might be.

This distinction might seem subtle, yet it's important. It's healthier to set goals that reflect your own improvements independent of anybody else. So, while the prize you hope for might still be to make varsity, the actual goals you set become things like choosing how many hours to practice. Or aiming to increase your free throw percentage. Or deciding what to start and stop eating or drinking to give your body the best chance to stay strong and healthy.

If you later do make the team, fantastic. If not, however, you can still hold your head high. You met your goals of giving yourself the best possible chance.

All you can do is your very best. Let that be what you strive for. Give yourself permission to leave everybody else's best out of your focus.



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## STAY OPTIMISTIC

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No matter how achievable your goals are, odds are that you'll almost certainly experience setbacks. Welcome to the human family. However, during such setbacks, the adversary tries hard to get you to quit. But that's not for you. Get back up, dust yourself off, and try again.

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland has taught: "As children of God, we should not demean or vilify ourselves, as if beating up on ourselves is somehow going to make us the person God wants us to become.

"My brothers and sisters, except for Jesus, there have been no flawless performances on this earthly journey we are pursuing, so while in mortality let's strive for steady improvement without obsessing over what behavioral scientists call 'toxic perfectionism.'<sup>1,2,3</sup>

In other words, keep at it. Keep involving God in your journey. If you do, you're bound to find a new and improved you down the road. Your main job is to keep your feet moving so that He can guide your steps accordingly. **NE**

### NOTES

1. Jeffrey R. Holland, Oct. 2017 general conference (*Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2017, 40).
2. Russell M. Nelson, Oct. 1995 general conference (*Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 88).
3. Jeffrey R. Holland, Oct. 2017 general conference (*Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2017, 42).

