

Most of us want to be better and the motivation to become so is a great blessing unless this desire turns into perfectionism. In a BYU devotional, Dr. Jeffry H. Larson described perfectionism as “the obsessive and rigid desire or expectation that we must do things perfectly or life is not good.” Eventually, instead of happily seeing ourselves progress, we can become discontent and self-critical.

“By ye perfect”

Our modern idea of perfection is defined by the Merriam-Webster dictionary as freedom from fault or defect. The faultless Savior himself said before his death “the third day I shall be perfected” (Luke 13:32). It seems that even Christ did not consider himself perfect until after his resurrection. In the Sermon on the Mount, Christ said “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect” (Matt. 5:48). It is not until after his resurrection when he visits the Nephites, that he admonishes the people to be perfect “even as I, or your father who is in heaven is perfect” (3 Ne. 12:48). Isn’t that interesting! He does not indicate he is perfect until after his resurrection. We are commanded to be perfect by an eternal being that sees eternally. The perfection that Christ is referencing is a process leading to completeness that will last far past this earthly life.

Perfectionistic

Even though we conceptually understand that perfection does not need to be reached in this life, we often obsess over the next test score, dating, or our social skills and abilities. This extreme worry stems from two lines of thought, “People will look down on me if I make a mistake” and “I’m less worthwhile when I fail.” As Proverbs 23:7 teaches “For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he.” If we can learn to change our thinking then we can begin to change and to gain patience for ourselves. Thinking that you will be judged for mistakes, leads us to ask, would you think less of your best friend if they got a low grade or test score? Or said something awkward, or even accidentally hurt your feelings? Likely not, and if your places were switched, neither would they. Try thinking about what they would say to you instead of what you’re saying to yourself. Most importantly, have faith that the Lord will never look down on you. He’s not upset at you for making a mistake. He already paid for all of our mistakes and his greatest desire is that we will receive the grace and forgiveness that he is continually offering us. He wants us to feel his love and healing. Your personal worth is not connected with earthly failure or success. Remember “the worth of souls is great in the sight of the Lord” (D&C 18:10) and your worth is not hinged on how many mistakes you make. Don’t label yourself as a bad person or someone who will never live up to expectations. Challenge your own thoughts when they become extreme or “all or nothing.” The best way to cast out fear or doubts is through strengthening your faith. Start by reading your favorite scriptures or some uplifting ones like 1 Nephi 11:17, 2 Nephi 26:28, and John 14:18. The more you fill your life with light, the less room for self-doubt there will be. If you cannot feel the spirit immediately, continue to try and the light will come eventually. If you feel as though you cannot change your thinking by yourself, please seek professional help. Contact the BYUH Counseling Center or go to their website for more information.

The information used for this fact sheet was found in the following articles:
 ‘Perfection Pending’ by Russell M. Nelson
 ‘Be Ye Therefore Perfect’ by Elder Cecil O. Samuelson
 Anxiety and Anxiety Disorders by Lyle J. Burrup



**ADDITIONAL
RESOURCES**

“Perfection Pending”
Russell M. Nelson

“Becoming Perfect in Christ”
Elder Gerrit W. Gong

BYU-Hawaii
Counseling Services
(808) 675-3518
counseling.byuh.edu
McKay Room 181

Therapy Assistance Online (TAO) is an online self-help program available through Counseling Services. It includes programs for depression, anxiety, stress, and body image and can be found through the Counseling Services website.