

Worthiness Is Not Flawlessness

By Bradley R. Wilcox

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When you feel like you have failed too many times to keep trying, remember Christ's Atonement and the grace it makes possible are real.

I once sent a message to my daughter and son-in-law using the voice-to-text feature on my phone. I said, "Hey, you two. Sure love you." They received, "Hate you two. Should love you." Isn't it amazing how easily a positive and well-intentioned message can be misunderstood? This is what sometimes happens with God's messages of repentance and worthiness.

Some mistakenly receive the message that repentance and change are unnecessary. God's message is that they are essential.¹ But doesn't God love us despite our shortcomings? Of course! He loves us perfectly. I love my grandchildren, imperfections and all, but that does not mean I don't want them to improve and become all they can become. God loves us as we are, but He also loves us too much to leave us this way.² Growing up unto the Lord is what mortality is all about.³ Change is what Christ's Atonement is all about. Not only can Christ resurrect, cleanse, console, and heal us, but through it all, He can transform us to become more like Him.⁴

Some mistakenly receive the message that repentance is a onetime event. God's message is that, as President Russell M. Nelson has taught, "Repentance ... is a process."⁵ Repentance may take time and repeated effort,⁶ so forsaking sin⁷ and having "no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually"⁸ are lifetime pursuits.⁹

Life is like a cross-country road trip. We can't reach our destination on one tank of gas. We must refill the tank over and over. Taking the sacrament is like pulling into the gas station. As we repent and renew our covenants, we pledge our willingness to keep the commandments, and God and Christ bless us with the Holy Spirit.¹⁰ In short, we promise to press forward on our journey, and God and Christ promise to refill the tank.

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patience and persistence more than it requires flawlessness.”¹⁴ The Lord has said the gifts of the Spirit are “given for the benefit of those who love me and keep all my commandments, *and him that seeketh so to do.*”¹⁵

One young man I’ll call Damon wrote: “Growing up, I struggled with pornography. I always felt so ashamed that I could not get things right.” Each time Damon slipped, the pain of regret became so intense, he harshly judged himself to be unworthy of any kind of grace, forgiveness, or additional chances from God. He said: “I decided I just deserved to feel terrible all the time. I figured God probably hated me because I wasn’t willing to work harder and get on top of this once and for all. I would go a week and sometimes even a month, but then I would relapse and think, ‘I’ll never be good enough, so what’s the use of even trying?’”

At one such low moment, Damon said to his priesthood leader: “Maybe I should just stop coming to church. I’m sick of being a hypocrite.”

His leader responded: “You’re not a hypocrite because you have a bad habit you are trying to break. You are a hypocrite if you hide it, lie about it, or try to convince yourself the Church has the problem for maintaining such high standards. Being honest about your actions and taking steps to move forward is not being a hypocrite. It is being a disciple.”¹⁶ This leader quoted Elder Richard G. Scott, who taught: “The Lord sees weaknesses differently than He does rebellion. ... When the Lord speaks of weaknesses, it is always with mercy.”¹⁷

That perspective gave Damon hope. He realized God was not up there saying, “Damon blew it again.” Instead, He was probably saying, “Look how far Damon has come.” This young man finally stopped looking down in shame or looking sideways for excuses and rationalizations. He looked up for divine help, and he found it.¹⁸

Damon said: “The only time I had turned to God in the past was to ask for forgiveness, but now I also asked for grace—His ‘enabling power’ [Bible Dictionary, “Grace”]. I had never done that before. These days I spend a lot less time hating myself for what I have done and a lot more time loving Jesus for what He has done.”

Considering how long Damon had struggled, it was unhelpful and unrealistic for parents and leaders assisting him to say “never again” too quickly or to arbitrarily set some standard of abstinence to be considered “worthy.” Instead, they started with small, reachable goals. They got rid of the all-or-nothing expectations and focused on incremental growth, which allowed Damon to build on a series of successes instead of failures.¹⁹ He, like the enslaved people of Limhi, learned he could “prosper by degrees.”²⁰

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perhaps for many days, even months and years. ... But we can do it because we can appeal to God ... for the help we need each day.”²¹

Now, brothers and sisters, the COVID-19 pandemic has not been easy for anyone, but the isolation associated with quarantine restrictions has made life especially difficult for those struggling with bad habits. Remember change is possible, repentance is a process, and worthiness is not flawlessness. Most important, remember that God and Christ are willing to help us right here and now.²²

Some mistakenly receive the message that God is waiting to help until *after* we repent. God’s message is that He will help us *as* we repent. His grace is available to us “no matter where we are in the path of obedience.”²³ Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf has said: “God does not need people who are flawless. He seeks those who will offer their ‘heart and a willing mind’ [Doctrine and Covenants 64:34], and He will make them ‘perfect in Christ’ [Moroni 10:32–33].”²⁴

So many have been hurt by broken and strained relationships that it is difficult for them to believe in God’s compassion and long-suffering. They struggle to see God as He is—a loving Father who meets us in our need²⁵ and knows how to “give good things to them that ask him.”²⁶ His grace is not just a prize for the worthy. It is the “divine assistance” He gives that helps us become worthy. It is not just a reward for the righteous. It is the “endowment of strength” He gives that helps us become righteous.²⁷ We are not just walking *toward* God and Christ. We are walking *with* Them.²⁸

Across the Church, young people recite the Young Women and Aaronic Priesthood Quorum Themes. From New Zealand to Spain to Ethiopia to Japan, young women say, “I cherish the gift of repentance.” From Chile to Guatemala to Moroni, Utah, young men say, “As I strive to serve, exercise faith, repent, and improve each day, I will qualify to receive temple blessings and the enduring joy of the gospel.”

I promise those blessings and that joy are real and within reach for those who keep all the commandments *and* “him that seeketh so to do.”²⁹ When you feel like you have failed too many times to keep trying, remember Christ’s Atonement and the grace it makes possible are real.³⁰ “[His] arm of mercy is extended towards you.”³¹ You are loved—today, in 20 years, and forever. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. 1. See John 3:3–6; Mosiah 27:25.
2. 2. See Neal A. Maxwell, “I Will Arise and Go to My Father,” *Ensign*, Sept. 1993, 65–68.
3. 3. See Helaman 3:21.

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7. 7. See Doctrine and Covenants 58:43.
8. 8. Mosiah 5:2.
9. 9. See Jacob 6:11; Alma 15:17.
10. 10. See 2 Nephi 31:20; Mosiah 18:10; Doctrine and Covenants 20:77.
11. 11. See Luke 15:11–32; Romans 3:23–25. Elder Gerrit W. Gong said, “To be worthy does not mean to be perfect” (“Always Remember Him,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2016, 109). Addressing the students at Brigham Young University, President Cecil O. Samuelson explained: “One can be fully worthy in [the] gospel sense and yet still be growing while dealing with personal imperfections. ... Worthiness is vital, but it is not the same as perfection” (“Be Ye Therefore Perfect” [Brigham Young University devotional, Sept. 6, 2011], 1, 5, speeches.byu.edu). Elder Marvin J. Ashton said: “Worthiness is a process, and perfection is an eternal trek. We can be worthy to enjoy certain privileges without being perfect” (“On Being Worthy,” *Ensign*, May 1989, 20).
12. 12. Elder Neil L. Andersen has called for “uncompromising honesty” and taught, “Honesty is the heart of spirituality and must be at the center of true and lasting repentance” (*The Divine Gift of Forgiveness* [2019], 193, 48).
13. 13. Elder Neil L. Andersen wrote, “We may slip back at times, but let us quickly and humbly return to our knees and move again in the right direction” (*The Divine Gift of Forgiveness*, 208).
14. 14. Bruce C. Hafen, *The Broken Heart* (1989), 186.
15. 15. Doctrine and Covenants 46:9; emphasis added.
16. 16. See Doctrine and Covenants 10:67.
17. 17. Richard G. Scott, “Personal Strength through the Atonement of Jesus Christ,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2013, 83.
18. 18. See Doctrine and Covenants 6:35–37.
19. 19. President Russell M. Nelson said: “The Lord does not expect perfection from us at this point in our eternal progression. But He does expect us to *become increasingly pure*” (“We Can Do Better and Be Better,” 68; emphasis added).
20. 20. Mosiah 21:16.

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22. 22. See Joshua 1:5, 9; Isaiah 41:10; Matthew 11:28–30; 2 Nephi 28:32; Doctrine and Covenants 24:8.
23. 23. D. Todd Christofferson, “Free Forever, to Act for Themselves,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2014, 19.
24. 24. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “Five Messages That All of God’s Children Need to Hear” (Brigham Young University devotional, Aug. 17, 2021), 3, speeches.byu.edu.
25. 25. See Ether 1:42–43.
26. 26. 3 Nephi 14:11.
27. 27. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “The Gift of Grace,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2015, 107; see also 2 Nephi 2:3; Jacob 4:7. President Russell M. Nelson has said, “The Lord does not require *perfect* faith for us to have access to His *perfect* power” (“Christ Is Risen; Faith in Him Will Move Mountains,” *Liahona*, May 2021, 102).
28. 28. See Deuteronomy 2:7; Matthew 1:23; Doctrine and Covenants 100:12. Elder Robert E. Wells wrote: “Our Heavenly Father is not an absentee God, nor is Jesus dead. They are relevant today as never before” (*The Mount and the Master* [1991], 26).
29. 29. Doctrine and Covenants 46:9.
30. 30. See Sheri Dew, *Amazed by Grace* (2015), 4.
31. 31. 3 Nephi 9:14.

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