

The Imperfect Harvest

By Elder Vern P. Stanfill
Of the Seventy

The Savior stands ready to accept our humble offerings and perfect them through His grace. With Christ, there is no imperfect harvest.

As a young boy, I learned to love the dramatic changes in the seasons of the year in southwest Montana, where I grew up. My favorite season was fall—the time of the harvest. Our family hoped and prayed that our months of hard work would be rewarded with a bountiful harvest. My parents worried over the weather, the health of animals and crops, and many other things over which they had little control.

As I grew, I became even more aware of the urgency involved. Our livelihood depended upon the harvest. My father taught me about the equipment we used to harvest grain. I watched as he would move the machinery into the field, cut a small swath of grain, and then check behind the combine to make sure that as much grain as possible landed in the holding tank and was not thrown out with the chaff. He repeated this exercise several times, adjusting the machine each time. I ran alongside and pawed through the chaff with him and pretended that I knew what I was doing.

After he was satisfied with the adjustments to the machine, I found some kernels of grain in the chaff on the ground and presented them to him with a critical look. I will not forget what my father said to me: “It is good enough and the best that this machine can do.” Not really satisfied with his explanation, I pondered the imperfections of this harvest.

A short time later, when the weather turned cold in the evenings, I watched thousands of migrating swans, geese, and ducks descend onto the fields to nourish themselves on their long journey south. They ate the leftover grain from our imperfect harvest. God had perfected it. And not a kernel was lost.

It is often a temptation in our world and even within the culture of the Church to obsess about perfection. Social media, unrealistic expectations, and often our own self-criticism create feelings of

inadequacy—that we are not good enough and never will be. Some even misunderstand the invitation of the Savior to “be ye therefore perfect.”¹

Remember that perfectionism is not the same as being perfected in Christ.² Perfectionism requires an impossible, self-inflicted standard that compares us to others. This causes guilt and anxiety and can make us want to withdraw and isolate ourselves.

Becoming perfected in Christ is another matter. It is the process—lovingly guided by the Holy Ghost—of becoming more like the Savior. The standards are set by a kind and all-knowing Heavenly Father and clearly defined in the covenants we are invited to embrace. It relieves us of the burdens of guilt and inadequacy, always emphasizing who we are in the sight of God. While this process lifts us and pushes us to become better, we are measured by our personal devotion to God that we manifest in our efforts to follow Him in faith. As we accept the Savior’s invitation to come unto Him, we soon realize that our best is good enough and that the grace of a loving Savior will make up the difference in ways we cannot imagine.

We can see this principle in effect when the Savior fed the five thousand.

“When Jesus then lifted up his eyes, and saw a great company come unto him, he saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat? ...

“Philip answered him, Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little.

“One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, saith unto him,

“There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among so many?”³

Do you ever wonder how the Savior must have felt about this young boy, who with the faith of a child offered what he must have known to be woefully inadequate in the face of the task at hand?

“And Jesus took the loaves; and when he had given thanks, he distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down; and likewise of the fishes as much as they would.

“When they were filled, he said unto his disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost.”⁴

The Savior perfected the humble offering.

Shortly after this experience, Jesus sent His disciples ahead on a boat. They soon found themselves on a stormy sea in the middle of the night. They became frightened when they saw a ghostly figure walking toward them on the water.

“But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid.

“And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water.

“And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus.

“But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me.

“And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?”⁵

Brothers and sisters, that may not have been the end of the conversation. I believe that as Peter and the Savior walked back to the ship arm in arm, Peter soaking wet and perhaps feeling very foolish, the Savior may have said something like this: “Oh, Peter, fear not and worry not. If you could see yourself as I see you, your doubt would fade and your faith increase. I love you, dear Peter; you got out of the boat. Your offering is acceptable, and even though you faltered, I will always be there to lift you from the depths, and your offering will be made perfect.”

Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf taught:

“I believe the Savior Jesus Christ would want you to see, feel, and know that He is your strength. That with His help, there are no limits to what you can accomplish. That your potential is limitless. He would want you to see yourself the way He sees you. And that is very different from the way the world sees you. ...

“He gives power to the weary; and to those who feel powerless, He increases strength.”⁶

We must remember that whatever our best-but-imperfect offering is, the Savior can make it perfect. No matter how insignificant our efforts may seem, we must never underestimate the Savior’s power. A simple word of kindness, a brief but sincere ministering visit, or a Primary lesson lovingly taught can, with the Savior’s help, provide comfort, soften hearts, and change eternal lives. Our clumsy efforts can lead to miracles, and in the process, we can participate in a perfect harvest.

Often we are placed in situations that will cause us to stretch. We may not feel up to the task. We may look at those we serve with and feel that we will never measure up. Brothers and sisters, if you feel this way, look at the extraordinary men and women seated behind me with whom I serve.

I feel your pain.

I have learned, however, that just as perfectionism is not the same as being perfected in Christ, self-comparison is not the same as emulation. When we compare ourselves to others, there can be only two results. Either we will see ourselves as better than others and become judgmental and critical of them, or we will see ourselves as less than others and become anxious, self-critical, and discouraged. Comparing ourselves to others is rarely productive, not uplifting, and sometimes downright depressing. In fact, these comparisons can be spiritually destructive, preventing us from receiving the spiritual help we need. On the other hand, emulating those we respect who demonstrate Christlike attributes can be instructive and uplifting and can help us become better disciples of Jesus Christ.

The Savior gave us a model to follow as He emulated the Father. He instructed His disciple Philip: “Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?”⁷

And then He taught, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also.”⁸

Regardless of how insignificant our efforts may seem, if we are sincere, the Savior will use us to accomplish His work. If we simply do the best we can and trust Him to make up the difference, we can become part of the miracles that surround us.

Elder Dale G. Renlund said, “You don’t have to be perfect, but we need you, because everybody who’s willing can do something.”⁹

And President Russell M. Nelson teaches us, “The Lord loves effort.”¹⁰

The Savior stands ready to accept our humble offerings and perfect them through His grace. With Christ, there is no imperfect harvest. We must have the courage to believe that His grace is for us—that He will help us, rescue us from the depths when we falter, and perfect our less-than-perfect efforts.

In the parable of the sower, the Savior describes the seeds that are planted in good ground. Some produce a hundredfold, some sixty, and others thirty. All are part of His perfect harvest.¹¹

The prophet Moroni invited all, “Yea, come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, ... and if ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness, and love God with all your might, mind and strength, then is his grace sufficient for you, that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ.”¹²

Brothers and sisters, I testify of Christ, who has the power to perfect even our most humble offering. Let us do our best, bring what we can,

and, with faith, lay our imperfect offering at His feet. In the name of Him who is Master of the perfect harvest, even Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Matthew 5:48.
2. See Moroni 10:32.
3. John 6:5, 7–9.
4. John 6:11–12.
5. Matthew 14:27–31.
6. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “Jesus Christ Is the Strength of Youth,” *Liahona*, Nov. 2022, 9–10.
7. John 14:9.
8. John 14:12.
9. Dale G. Renlund, in Aubrey Eyre, “Elder Renlund Visits Caribbean Saints Preparing to Withstand ‘Seismic Hits of Life,’” *Church News*, Mar. 4, 2020, [ChurchofJesusChrist.org](https://www.ChurchofJesusChrist.org).
10. Russell M. Nelson, in Joy D. Jones, “An Especially Noble Calling,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2020, 16.
11. See Matthew 13:1–23.
12. Moroni 10:32.