

Come Unto Christ and Be Perfected in Him

In the last verses of the last chapter of the Book of Mormon, Moroni leaves his final message. It is the great overarching invitation of the Book of Mormon: Come unto Christ. "Yea, come unto Christ, and be perfected in him." (Moroni 10:32)

As missionaries, you spend your days inviting others to do this; to come unto Christ, to come as they are, exercise their faith, repent and be baptized. We don't expect them to be perfect, but to have faith and a desire to follow Christ. But do we accept that same invitation for ourselves?

Some of us, and I include myself in that group, tend to have our version of scriptures like Moroni 10:32 that goes something like, "Be perfect!"... so we try and we try and we try some more, but we can't do it!

In a short video called "5 Minute Fireside" A sister named Michelle Wilson explains that "The problem isn't that we are striving to be better or even striving for perfection, but it is in how we define it or go about it. We think **we are responsible to be perfect**, to act perfect, to look perfect, to check off a list all the things we have to do to "be perfect". This definition of "perfect" puts the focus on "I"— what I can do to be perfect, it puts great value on what others think of us and how we compare to them. The problem with this type of perfection is that it just makes us feel bad. It makes us feel desperate.

It does not make us feel more like the Savior or closer to Him.

Perfection is not solely a performance based pursuit. You may remember this Quote from Elder Holland, that President Teuscher shared with you in a previous zone conference. It is worth repeating, "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." (Elder Holland)

And yet those scriptures...that tell us to be perfect! Let's read Moroni's invitation again, "Yea, come unto Christ and be perfected in Him. This couplet teaches a profound truth: perfection, Moroni teaches, is about proximity! In order to **become** perfected (notice the non- instantaneous word *become*) we have to choose to come closer to Christ. Moroni didn't say be perfect, then come to Christ (that's our dyslexic version) he said "Come unto Christ and be perfected in Him." First we have to **come**.

Sister Wilson taught that “The Savior is not looking to find perfection in us (he’d never find it) but he is looking for **us** to find perfection in **Him** and when we find it in Him we find peace. And all of those things we were trying so desperately to be perfect at ourselves? Well, as we focus on our proximity to the Savior and aligning our lives with his—that’s when Grace, through the atonement can make all of those things possible or help us see that they are not important as we thought they were.

A Christian writer named John Simpson said: “Sometimes well-meaning Christians tell people that they have to “clean up their lives” before God will accept them, but that is not what we see in Scripture. When speaking to the woman at the well who was living with a man she was not married to ([John 4:1–26](#)), Jesus addressed the fact of her sin, then offered her the salvation she needed. Again, when the woman caught in adultery ([John 8:1–11](#)) was brought before Jesus, He told her, “Go, and sin no more.” The sin was never excused or ignored, but forgiveness was offered to anyone who recognized his sin and was willing to confess and forsake it. God certainly expects us to leave our sin, but that comes as a part of our salvation, not as a prerequisite. We are not able to clean ourselves up without God’s help.

I’d like to share two other scripture stories from Christ’s life that show this same pattern.

The first is in Matthew 8:5-13, I’ll just read a few of the verses.

5 And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him,

6 And saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented.

7 And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him.

8 The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed.

Jesus marveled because of this man’s faith and he told his disciples that “I have not found so great faith, no not in Israel.” (vs. 10) The centurion believed that he was unworthy, However, even though he felt this way he still approached the Savior and asked for help. Do we ever fail to reach out to the Savior and ask for help because we feel unworthy?

The other example I love is the woman with the issue of blood found in Mark 5:24-30 I don't know if she too felt unworthy of his presence, probably, since her illness made her an outcast, but perhaps after so many years of suffering it was simply all the energy she could muster just to reach out and make contact with the hem of his garment. But that small act of reaching out to him with great faith was enough to summon virtue to flow from him and heal her. And he said unto her, daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole;.” (vs. 34)

In both cases, it was their faith that mattered to Christ, not the level of perfection they had achieved on their own.

Christ passed by hundreds of others that day the woman reached out to him. I'm sure some of them were sick or in need of healing too. Why weren't they healed like she was? There is something significant in our reaching out to him. As we reach out to the Savior in faith, from wherever we are, whether that be a recent heart-break or after years of suffering, whether we are sick of heart, of body, of mind or of spirit, He will heal us. So let's reach out and let the healing begin. It may not be immediate, but it will be real as long as we keep reaching out and making contact with Him. We don't need to wait to "be perfect" or even "be better" than we currently are before we come unto him.

In his masterful sermon Songs, Sung and Unsung, Elder Holland says, **"there is room in this choir for all who wish to be there, "Come as you are," a loving Father says to each of us, but He adds, "Don't plan to stay as you are." We smile and remember that God is determined to make of us more than we thought we could be.**

In keeping with Elder Holland's music theme, I'd like to share this very thoughtful analogy of how Christ can begin to work on perfecting and fine-tuning us as we come unto Him. It was written by a woman named

Bonnie Overly

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"On Tuesday I had our piano tuned. It seems like such a tedious job to be a piano tuner – playing and correcting each note individually, tapping each key again and again while adjusting the tightness of the strings, until the pitch is correct. The tuner worked his way around the keyboard slowly – sometimes a whole step, sometimes only a half step -- and adjusted each note, playing each one over and over again. He checked and rechecked, adjusted and readjusted. Every now and then he would play in octaves to make sure the pitches were blending and vibrating together the way they should be and to make sure the tuning he had done so far was correct. Then he played chords. Sometimes he would go back to working on individual notes, his fingers hopping around the piano a bit more. Finally, when every string had been worked and tuned, he played a beautiful song, with his fingers running masterfully up and down the keyboard.

As I listened to the piano tuner work each note of my piano, I thought of the Savior's command to "Be ye perfect," (Matthew 5:48) and the greater insight we can gain from the original Greek word *teleios*, which means 'complete,' and which, as President Russell M. Nelson noted, "does NOT imply 'free from error.'"

It struck me that the piano tuner did not sit down, open up the piano, and begin work on a dozen notes at once. Nor did he start randomly. Every pitch has to be adjusted based on its relationship to a chosen fixed pitch (in this case, A440, the A note above middle C). Because pianos typically have multiple strings for each piano key, each individual string among several that make up that particular note must be vibrating at the same frequency to eliminate the dissonant sound that an out-of-tune piano produces.

It's tedious. And it takes a long time. And no matter how expensive the piano is, how masterfully it is played, or how meticulously it is cared for, it will **ALWAYS** need to be tuned again. Even the most perfectly pitched Steinway concert grand

will need adjustments on a regular basis for the entire life of the instrument. And this -- we easily understand -- in no way makes the piano a failure. Yet, how often do I get down on myself because the same notes in my life that needed tuning six months ago -- the ones I THOUGHT I had a handle on -- need tuning again?

I love the words of Elder Lynn G. Robbins, who said, “Repentance isn’t God’s backup plan in the event we might fail. Repentance **is** His plan, knowing that we will.” It is the regular maintenance and tuning that allows us to align and realign each note of our lives to play in harmony with the true Fixed Pitch – our Savior Jesus Christ.

Every note in our lives will fall out of tune and need to be adjusted -- not once or twice, but dozens or hundreds, or even thousands of times. In addition, there may be things that will need greater repair than just tuning – a string that needs to be replaced, or a failing hammer, or a too-loose tuning pin; a broken key, or a cracked soundboard, or a jammed pedal. There is no need to get discouraged because of this. When the piano was built it was fully expected that this would be the case, just as it is fully expected that we will need tuning and repair throughout our lives. And just as the piano tuner does not begin by working on dozens of notes at once, we do not need to worry that we cannot change everything about ourselves in one day. Each note, each step, each half-step matters, and all need individual attention and care from the tuner – one at a time -- in order to sing the way they were meant to.

President Nelson said, “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. It awaits all who love him and keep his commandments.”

And if we are patient with ourselves, as the piano tuner is with each note, and work consistently to be in harmony with the Fixed Pitch that is our Savior, how beautiful our song will one day become!”

Quoting Elder Holland again, “Many of us who are “musically challenged” have had our confidence bolstered and our singing markedly improved by positioning ourselves next to someone with a stronger, more certain voice. Surely it follows that in singing the anthems of eternity, we should stand as close as humanly possible to the Savior and Redeemer of the world—who has absolutely perfect pitch. We then take courage from His ability to hear our silence and take hope from His melodious messianic intercession in our behalf. Truly it is “when the Lord is near” that “the dove of peace sings in my heart [and] the flow’rs of grace appear.”

Yea, come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness; 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; and if by the grace of God ye are perfect in Christ, ye can in nowise deny the power of God. And again, if ye by the grace of God are perfect in Christ, and deny not his power, then are ye sanctified in Christ by the grace of God, through the shedding of the blood of Christ, which is in the covenant of the Father unto the remission of your sins, that ye become holy, without spot. (Moroni 10:33,34)

I have some spots still, so do you and so does everyone else. But as I have come unto Him and tried to love him and obey his commandments, some of those spots are gone, or at least they are fading. I know if I continue to come unto Him and deny not his power, that I can be healed from the many, many spots I still have.

Elders and Sisters, my invitation is the same as Moroni’s, “Come unto Christ.” Whatever that takes. Make whatever sacrifice is necessary. Reject ungodliness. Embrace every commandment and embrace your covenants. Accept that his grace is sufficient for you and deny not his power. Be perfected IN HIM. I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.