

## Not yet perfect

1. I don't know if it is my competitive nature, or just some character quirk that God felt I needed, but I don't like to try new things if I am not going to be good at them. And if I try a new thing and am not good at it, I often don't want to do it anymore.
2. I know that this is completely unreasonable. Why should I be an expert the first time I try something? Despite knowing that practicing a thing makes one better at the thing, I find myself doubting, if I am bad at something, that I could ever practice enough to be good at it.
  - a. In reality, the things that I *am* good at are things that have taken a lot of practice. Basketball was one of those things. I was so bad in middle school that I couldn't even regularly make lay-ups. By the time I was in tenth grade in high school, I was getting beaten up because I would make people look bad on the basketball court.
  - b. I remember, very distinctly, being at a basketball court one summer. We were playing five on five, full court. I was the best player on my team, and the other players were getting the ball to me to score. Finally, one of the players on the other team, Mike Esposito, thundered at his teammates, "The next person who let's Mike Bridge score is getting punched in the face."
3. I am not as naturally gifted at sports as either of my brothers. They could both pick up a sport and instantly be the best, or one of the best people playing. My younger brother, Nick, was the worst. The first time he played a game he would dominate and you with think he had been doing it forever. My pride came in the fact that I became much better than my brothers at basketball because of hard work and practice.
  - a. I can actually remember going to the football field in the summer at 6 AM to go through a series of sprints and endurance exercises to get me in shape better shape. And then I would play basketball often eight hours a day.
4. RC Sproul, in talking about the fleeting nature of earthly success, pointed out that winning a championship rarely satisfies a player. They immediately set about trying to win another one the following season. That is true. While I was never on a team that won championships, I never felt like I was good enough. I always knew there was room to grow and improve. I wasn't some kind of phenomenon or anything. But even if I was, I would have had to keep working to improve. What set athletes like Jerry Rice and Michael Jordan ahead of others was that they never stopped practicing and working to improve.
5. In Philippians 3, Paul is speaking of straining on toward the goal. He knows that he is saved. He knows that he is a Christian. Yet he knows that there is more to the Christian life than simply "receiving salvation." We are to grow, to mature, to "press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." (v. 14) The life of the Christian is one of constant practice and growth.
  - a. In vs. 12, Paul says, "Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect..." Then in 15 he says, "Let those of us who are mature think this way," referring back to vs. 14 and continuing to press on toward the goal.

- b. The ESV Study Bible note says that the word translated as mature in vs. 15 is the same word translated as perfect in vs. 12. In essence, Paul is reasoning that the only way to be perfect and mature is to recognize that you are not indeed perfect and mature, as this will lead to the constant push for perfection and maturity.
- c. Michael Jordan never felt like he was good enough at basketball. Paul never felt like he was good enough at living the Christian life.

### Imitate the godly

1. None of this is meant to make us feel bad. Instead, it is meant to inspire us. First, we might think that if we could only be like Paul, we would be perfect. Yet Paul knew that *he* wasn't perfect either. So, we should feel more comfortable that we aren't ever going to reach that level of perfection in righteousness in this life.
2. Second, Paul calls us to imitate him- or, more accurately, imitate him and others like him; those committed to their walk and their growth in Christ. We aren't being told that we can't ever do it (though we can't). We are being called to find good role models, mentors, coaches, pastors, guides, or whoever else that we can be disciplined more and continue in our growth.
  - a. Paul may not have reached the goal of Christian perfection, as none of us will until we are before Christ, but Paul is farther ahead in his walk than I am. So, let me imitate him.
  - b. When I was new to Protestantism, I imitated Scott Quinn, my pastor in Pittsburgh. By the time I was in seminary (ten or twelve years later), I was ready to move on to someone who could push me even further, and so I found and learned from Paul Cooper. In both instances I was sitting at the feet of an imperfect person; and in both instances I was sitting at the feet of one who was ahead of where I was and who could help me press on to a new level.
3. Paul was also adamant that we need to commit ourselves to being disciplined by, or imitating those who are committed to the gospel of Jesus Christ and growing in his ways. As he says in vs. 18-19, "For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. <sup>19</sup> Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things."
  - a. Not all who present themselves as solid Christians are actually so. Many walk as enemies of the cross. Often, though not always, we can tell these people because they are trying to get us to follow them and their ideas more than they are pushing us to follow the scriptures or the Father/Son presented there.
4. They walk as enemies, but our citizenship is in heaven. When we belong to Christ, we are already citizens of his kingdom. We haven't mastered the faith and accomplished all God has for us to do in this life; but we are secure in our citizenship that when we pass from this life, if we belong to Christ because of his death and resurrection, then we are raised with him and our future is assured.
  - a. Until then, until we get there... to the final destination, we are to continue to "practice" the faith, to grow, to be disciplined, and to imitate the saints that we might be further conformed to the image of our savior.