

Discovering Your Divine Individuality

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I am so excited to be here speaking to all of you. I know it might make me seem a little weird that I want to speak in front of thousands of people, but that is okay. I know I am a little weird. All my life I have enjoyed being an individual who is different from those around me. I am over six feet tall, but I still wear heels so I can be even taller. As a volleyball player, on long flights to away games I would sit cramped in my seat doing my calculus homework while my teammates teased me for being a nerd. I still find “your mom” jokes hilarious and will laugh loud enough that someone a mile away can hear. I don’t know anyone exactly like me, and I truly enjoy it.

Some of you may be thinking, “She is crazy! Who wants to stick out all the time? Isn’t it nice to just fit in sometimes?” Whether you want to be different or you feel you are too different, it is okay. We are supposed to be different. We were different individuals in the pre-earth life, and we will continue to be different in the next life. This was important knowledge for me to gain because as I think about working toward perfection—a common goal for many of us—I worry I may lose some of my personality traits that allow me to be me. If we are all perfect, kind, faithful, obedient, and knowledgeable, will we all be the same?

It would be kind of like Syndrome’s statement in *The Incredibles* when he says he will sell his inventions so everyone can be superheroes: “And when everyone’s super, no one will be” (IMDb’s pages for quotes for *The Incredibles* [2004], imdb.com/title/tt0317705/quotes).

Now I don’t fear that all of us will become perfect in this life—of course none of us will be perfect in a lifetime. But as I continue to work toward this common goal, I want to keep my sense of self. How can I keep my individuality while striving for perfection?

I will work to answer the following questions and discuss several examples. First, what defines our individuality and why is individuality important? Second, what is perfection and what attributes define it? Do we have to be the same to be perfect, or can we be different? Third, I will give some examples of a group of individuals who represent both perfection and individuality. Fourth, I will focus on us—where we are and where we go from here. How do we learn to love and strengthen our individual attributes and become like Christ?

Julie Crockett, BYU associate professor of mechanical engineering, delivered this devotional on March 6, 2018.

The Blessings of Individuality

First, what defines our individuality and why is it important?

One of the ways we are individuals is through our gifts—those things that come easily to us. Our innate capabilities help define who we are and are often related to those things we are naturally inclined to enjoy. In addition, we all have different experiences in life, which results in an infinite number of perspectives.

To illustrate the importance of these differences associated with our personalities, I will use an example of my college senior design project. At BYU we call it a capstone project. It is the final, culminating experience of an engineering student's undergraduate education.

As you may guess from my job here as a mechanical engineering professor, I was, at one time, a mechanical engineering student. To attain this degree, as a senior you must design and build something that solves a given problem. For my senior design project, my group was given the task of creating a cheap machine that would test the strength of objects under a dynamic load. A dynamic load is a force on an object that changes over time: it increases, decreases, and then repeats, increasing and decreasing. For example, all of us sitting here on the stand represent a static load, or a constant force the structure must withstand. But if all of a sudden everyone stood up and started jumping up and down at the same time, this would represent a dynamic load. Our weight is applied and then removed, applied and then removed. I am unsure if this stand has been dynamically tested. Would anyone like to jump with me and find out?

Dynamic loading machines are generally not cheap because they must move, so our goal was to make a cheap one. With a few other senior mechanical engineering students, all of whom had taken the same courses and had the same collegiate educational background, we began brainstorming ideas to solve this problem. In this phase of the design process it became immediately clear that the variety of our life experiences was

essential to a good design. Although we all had the same formal training, we each had come from different backgrounds and had spent our free time doing different things. Our individual inspiration for what this machine would look like was also different.

One student, whose parents owned a business melting metals and creating art, had ideas associated with changing the temperature, which would cause expansion and contraction, thus applying an oscillating load. Another student, who enjoyed sailing, discussed systems of pulleys that could change a one-directional loading motion into a rotational loading motion. A few of us rode bikes, and we realized that the rotational motion of the wheels allows for dynamic loading on the wheels as they rotate. With a number of other ideas, and after much discussion, we eventually settled on a disk system in which the rotation would provide the dynamic part of the process but a single connection would allow for one-directional loading.

We moved on to accomplishing mathematical calculations, creating computer drawings, building a prototype, and writing a report. In this stage of the process, our individuality in preference became clear. I quite enjoy math and took the bulk of that responsibility. Although I can create computer drawings, one of my teammates was not only better at it but also truly enjoyed creating them, so he put his main efforts there. The same was true for building and writing.

Together we were able to create a cheap, working machine that applied the necessary dynamic loads to the objects to be tested. None of us alone would have come up with the final design we used. Individually we would not have been as successful or enjoyed the work as much. It was absolutely necessary for each of us to truly be individuals with different ideas, stemming from different life experiences and different preferences, while all still being qualified mechanical engineers.

This important aspect of who we are—our individuality—comes from God. Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf said:

Some [may] believe that the Church wants to create every member from a single mold—that each one should look, feel, think, and behave like every other. This would contradict the genius of God, who created every man different from his brother, every son different from his father. Even identical twins are not identical in their personalities and spiritual identities. . . .

The Church thrives when we take advantage of this diversity and encourage each other to develop and use our talents to lift and strengthen our fellow disciples. [“Four Titles,” Ensign, May 2013]

We are supposed to be different! We were created as such for our individual growth and the growth of our friends and neighbors. Our individuality began before we were here and will continue on after we leave. We can—and should—keep our good personality traits and remember those experiences that allow us to have a different perspective so that we can empathize with and encourage others.

Perfection Without Sameness

If being different is so wonderful and by divine design, then what attributes should we change? For example, I personally feel a bit of road rage. I would maybe call it road frustration, since I am easily annoyed by people who are going slower than I am or are not immediately taking off when a red light turns green. I don't believe my quickness to anger is an important attribute to my individuality. I could say it is who I am, so it is okay to get mad, but I don't think that is the best solution either.

This brings me to my second set of questions: What is perfection and what attributes define it? Do we have to be the same to be perfect, or can we be different? As we are changing and growing to become like our Heavenly Father, there are some things about us that will become similar—such as no one getting mad at each other on the road, which is probably a good thing. But I highly doubt that we will all grow to attain the same sense of humor or love of classical literature or desire to run a marathon just because we are striving for perfection.

To attain perfection we must follow the only man who lived on earth who was able to do so: our Savior, Jesus Christ. *Preach My Gospel* outlines nine important Christlike attributes: faith in Jesus Christ, hope, charity and love, virtue, knowledge, patience, humility, diligence, and obedience (see chapter 6, “How Do I Develop Christlike Attributes,” 115–23). As we further develop these attributes, we become more Christlike, and thus more perfect.

As we develop these necessary attributes, how do we still keep our own personality? As I mentioned, I have not completely developed the Christlike attribute of patience, especially on the road. I do not usually cut people off or yell, but as I pass, you may see me saying to myself, “Come on, people, let's go!” I don't think my frustration makes me a horrible person, but it definitely is not Christlike.

A while ago I decided to start listening to Spanish teaching podcasts while driving to help with my impatience. Now if you see me talking in my car, I am no longer asking you to go faster. Instead, I am practicing very important phrases, such as, “¿Dónde está el queso?”

This practice of trying to become more patient has also taught me to learn by listening and repeating. I have always been the type of person who needs to see things in addition to hearing them. Now I have the capability of learning in a new way. Thus, in the process of becoming more Christlike in patience, I have developed a new personality trait that defines who I am, and it is one that I am much more proud of than road rage.

As we become more perfect, we actually become more individual and our divine self emerges. Elder Uchtdorf taught, “While the Atonement is meant to help us all become more like Christ, it is not meant to make us all the same” (“Four Titles”).

During our lives here on earth, we can learn who we truly are. This does not refer to who we are in the worldly sense, in which we say, “Eh, that is just who I am,” and then do whatever we want. That is the natural man. Instead, we can deepen

our understanding of who we are as divine sons and daughters of God, heirs to a throne. And as each of us becomes perfected, we allow ourselves to be reminded of who we were and who we can become. That identity is not the person next to you; it is the person in your seat. He or she has your adventurous nature, your quick wit, or your dramatic flair. He or she is you. No matter how faithful, hopeful, charitable, virtuous, knowledgeable, patient, humble, diligent, and obedient you become, you will never, ever become your neighbor. This knowledge brings me peace because I want to be me and keep those personality traits that define me, but I also want to eventually be perfect and have Christlike traits as well.

I have compiled a list of a few personality traits that you may have but that are not necessary for perfection:

Competitive	High-spirited	Venturesome
Vivacious	Playful	Logical
Rustic	Independent	Warm
Frugal	Patriotic	Observant
Spontaneous	Charismatic	Witty
Dignified	Relaxed	Sociable
Dreamy	Reserved	Original
Intense	Earthy	Serious
Sentimental	Outspoken	Systematic
Daring	Breezy	Romantic
Stoic	Dramatic	Imaginative
Clever	Calm	Methodical
	Artful	

See if you can find some of your traits. Some of my own personality traits from the list are *competitive, independent, systematic, playful, relaxed, and high-spirited*. This list contains some personality traits that can set us apart while still allowing us to be similar in the traits that make us more Christlike. I hope this brings peace to those of you who may already feel too different. We have much in common, but each of us should bring an individual personality to this life and the next, as it is necessary for growth and progression.

Unity Through Differences

Some of our differences are very clear on earth. We have different physical and mental capabilities and are obviously imperfect. But what about perfect beings? They have developed the attributes I mentioned earlier and have gained all knowledge, so are they the same?

This brings me to my third point—an example of perfect beings who are different. The only group I can think of in this category is the Godhead.

The Godhead consists of three distinct Beings: Heavenly Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost. Are they the same? It has been stated many times that the Godhead is one in purpose. Nephi wrote:

And now, behold, this is the doctrine of Christ, and the only and true doctrine of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, which is one God, without end.
[2 Nephi 31:21]

And Christ taught:

For behold, verily I say unto you, that the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost are one; and I am in the Father, and the Father in me, and the Father and I are one. [3 Nephi 11:27]

It is clear that the Godhead is one, but we know this means one in purpose, not one in being. Each member of the Godhead is a distinctly different individual who has a distinct personality. We can know this because we can know each of Them individually.

Do we know our Heavenly Father—not just as a member of the Godhead but as our Father? As a Divine Being who wants us to join Him in glory and exaltation? I do. I know my Heavenly Father as a loving, caring, overseeing Father who is there for me when I need His strength and guidance. He encourages me, supports me, and gently lifts me when I fall. As we build a relationship with Him through intent prayer and honest action on His words, we come to know Him as our Father. My Heavenly Father is real. He is an individual. And He cares for me.

Do we know our Savior, Jesus Christ, our Elder Brother, who has provided a way for us to return to our Heavenly Father? There are so many stories of Jesus Christ's life and teachings throughout the scriptures, so we have many opportunities to get to know Him and His personality. One of my favorite personality traits of Christ is His immense love and care for the "one." While thousands listened to His sermons, He still had the desire to meet the needs of the individual one. He healed individuals of maladies, including blindness, leprosy, lameness, and even death. He forgave. He paused to bless children: "Suffer the little children to come unto me" (Mark 10:14).

In Matthew 15 we find an example of Christ giving time to and caring for the one. After Christ preached along the coast, a woman whose daughter had a devil was pleading with the disciples, who wanted to turn her away. Christ was tired and would continue preaching again soon anyway, so she could come back then. But in verse 24 we read Christ's response to His disciples: "But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

Jesus Christ could not turn away even one of the lost sheep, and this is not an isolated incident. He knows He was sent unto all the lost sheep of the house of Israel, but He does not think of us as an amorphous blob that He is trying to pull along with Him. Instead, He thinks of us as individuals He must walk alongside and lead. I believe His concern for individuals is a part of His personality. He cares for everyone in a broad sense, but He also cannot help but pause for one in pain. This is His personality. While one might expect this of someone who has felt all our pains, it was true of Him even before He could empathize with us through His suffering in Gethsemane. And it was true of Him after His suffering, when, in unimaginable pain as He was about to be led to His execution, He paused to heal the ear Peter had smote off one of the servants of the high priests.

My Savior loves me. He loves the one. The Atonement that He performed has affected me. It has brought me forgiveness and strength and has

eased my pain. I know that He, as an individual, loves me, as an individual. Although He is one in purpose with our Heavenly Father, He is a distinct, separate Being with a different personality whom I am honored to call my Brother.

Finally, do we know the Holy Ghost? He, unlike God and Jesus Christ, is a spirit, which immediately and clearly separates Him from Them. But He also has a different role in the Godhead. He is that Spirit which brings us truth and peace. President Spencer W. Kimball said:

He is a reminder and will bring to our remembrance the things which we have learned. . . . He is a testifier and will bear record to us of the divinity of the Father and the Son. . . . He is a teacher and will increase our knowledge. He is a companion and will walk with us, inspiring us all along the way. [TSWK, 23]

I know the Holy Ghost is a distinct Being who has testified, inspired, strengthened, and walked beside me as a companion. He is not my Heavenly Father or Jesus Christ. He is the Comforter, and He is my friend.

Talk about a "dream team!" These three perfect and distinct individuals work together "to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man" (Moses 1:39). Each has Their own role, and it is essential that They be different to accomplish Their goal. In fact, what would be the need to emphasize Their "oneness" throughout the scriptures if Their perfection had already made Them the same?

Learning to Value Diversity

One of my research areas provides a good example for how we can be the same in purpose while still being different as individuals. My specialty within mechanical engineering is called fluid dynamics. This is the study of the movement of liquids and gases, such as the air flowing around your car as you drive or the water streaming through the Hoover Dam to create power. Specifically, I research how water behaves on superhydrophobic surfaces.

A water droplet that falls onto a smooth, hydrophilic (water attracting) surface sticks to the surface. A water droplet that falls onto a superhydrophobic (super water-repelling) surface bounces off of the surface. When water droplets fall onto superhydrophobic surfaces of different shapes, the water still bounces or rolls on the surface. And as a droplet rolls, it takes up the dirt in its path, leaving a dirt-free streak. For this reason we refer to these surfaces as self-cleaning. I am sure you can think of many applications in which this would be beneficial: never needing to clean your shower, perhaps, or always getting the last drop of ketchup out of the bottle. However, the point is not how cool these superhydrophobic surfaces are—although they are very cool—but how they are made.

There are two very important components: first, the surface must be water repellent, and second, the surface must include a texture on the micron level or smaller. The result is that water will rest only on top of the microstructures, causing the water to bead up almost entirely into a sphere, thereby enhancing its ability to roll and bounce.

We make these surfaces by chemically etching into silicon wafers and then coating them with Teflon, a chemical used on some cookware. Other researchers at BYU also create them by growing carbon nanotubes about one hundred times smaller than the microstructures. There is also a commercial coating that has microbeads embedded in the liquid spray. Observing water on a leaf demonstrates that these surfaces occur in nature as well. There are many more ways to create superhydrophobic surfaces, but all of the methods allow for the same properties that make them so popular: they have a microstructure and are chemically water repellent, and thus they are all self-cleaning. They are the same in purpose, but each has been created using a different process and each looks different at the microscopic level.

One final example of working toward perfection while keeping our individuality is the current First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. [Three photos—one of each member of the First Presidency when they were

younger—were shown.] Our prophet, President Russell M. Nelson, can be seen gleefully swinging in the left image. In the center image we learn who Cosmo the Cougar really is—President Dallin H. Oaks, the first counselor. And finally, in the right image is a man who could give President Kevin J. Worthen a run for his money on the basketball court: President Henry B. Eyring, the second counselor. These three great men have wonderful yet different personalities. We can know this by the way they speak, the stories they share from their lives, the things they are most passionate about, and the way they interact with each other and with us.

But on January 16 of this year, they spoke to the members of the Church, united as the new First Presidency, in an unprecedented broadcast from the Salt Lake Temple. President Nelson said:

As a new presidency, we want to begin with the end in mind. . . . The end for which each of us strives is to be endowed with power in a house of the Lord, sealed as families, faithful to covenants made in a temple that qualify us for the greatest gift of God, that of eternal life. ["A Message from the First Presidency," 16 January 2018, 3, [lds.org/bc/content/ldsorg/church/news/2018/01/19/2018-01-1000-a-message-from-the-first-presidency.pdf?lang=eng](https://www.lds.org/bc/content/ldsorg/church/news/2018/01/19/2018-01-1000-a-message-from-the-first-presidency.pdf?lang=eng)]

Our new First Presidency is made up of three amazing individuals who serve together as one and whose purpose is to help us make and keep sacred covenants. Because they are using their different personalities to work toward the same goal, they are a strong team.

Appreciating Our Individuality

And so we have come to “us,” my fourth point. Where are we and where do we go from here? How do we learn to love and strengthen our individual attributes as we grow toward perfection and also gain some similar attributes?

Let me use myself, when I first began to learn engineering, as an example. One day, as a kid, I was out in the garage trying to find something to do. I noticed a few pieces of wood and thought,

“I can build a shelf! I know what a shelf looks like. It has sides, a top, a bottom, and a few shelves in between.” I asked my parents if I could use the few leftover pieces of two-by-fours in the garage to build a shelf.

I started by putting the bottom next to the side and hammering in a nail. Then I placed the top next to the side and hammered in another nail. After hammering a few more nails, and after a few times hammering the garage floor, I had made a “shelf.” It was bad. It sat at an angle unless you touched it—in which case it fell over. I knew it was not a good shelf, but I was still proud of it. I had never built anything from such raw materials before. I enjoyed making it, I enjoyed learning, and I was proud that I had tried.

Sometimes my choices in life feel like that first shelf. As I faithfully act to try to improve a Christlike quality in myself, I may get it all wrong. I am sure more than a few of you can relate to attempting to be obedient by reading your scriptures at night, only to find yourself waking up on them the next morning. Our first attempt will not be our best attempt. But we must try—we must act—or we will never be able to build on that first, likely failed experience. Our next attempt will be better, and the next one better after that, until we are perfect in that thing.

My first foray into engineering was not a success, but I have built on that experience significantly. And although I would not say I am perfect at engineering, I would say I am much

more proficient. I had to have that first experience, and I had to act to guide me to the end result. As I have grown as an engineer, I have expanded my knowledge and capabilities such that I have become more diverse than when I knew so little. I can design and build any type of shelf now, whereas when I first tried, I could only build a wobbly structure that might stab you with nails.

As we become more perfect, more like Christ, we become more individual. We begin to comprehend our eternal nature. We recognize truth and are able to think more deeply about it, which leads us to gain a better understanding of ourselves and others and thus become stronger individuals. C. S. Lewis wrote, “Good, as it ripens, becomes continually more different not only from evil but from other good” (*The Great Divorce* [New York: Macmillan, 1946], 6, preface, paragraph 1).

As our knowledge grows and our hearts change on our quest to be more like Christ, we do not lose our individuality but come to know our true, eternal, and individual self. You are, and always will be, the one—the individual whom Christ so regularly spoke of finding and saving. But your neighbor is also the one. Your neighbor is different but also growing to be more like Christ and himself or herself, as you are doing the same.

I pray we can support each other in this quest of perfection and individuality as we work together to build the kingdom of God. I say these things in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.