

THE MARK

Whether by chance or the conspicuous pluck of her own ingenuity, Jenna's inbox dinged with delight as her college acceptance letter arrived. It was the culmination of years of half-hearted focus on her studies. Jenna was one of those kids that didn't have to try very hard in school. So she didn't.

In fact, the news hit her parents much harder than she. They quietly celebrated that their daughter had finally hit the mark, she was going to college.

Being the sister of two accomplished older brothers, Jenna struggled under the silent expectations of her family to measure-up. The shadows of her brother's popular reputations were often the sunniest places she could find. For her it was better to be known as Justin's or Ben's sister, rather than by her own merit; or lack thereof.

Jenna found it difficult to make and keep friends. She suffered from bouts of anxiety and depression that turned basic tasks into Mount Everest climbs. She did things that, even by nonconventional standards, she knew were hurtful and wrong. And yet, as her parents knew well, there was great goodness in her too.

There are very few of us that fit neat and square in the boxes of 'good' or 'bad'. Tyrants have moments of kindness. Saints have moments of weakness. We are complex and multilayered creatures that from an early age are expected to straddle lines that tell us whether we have something to offer - or not.

So when Jesus conducted one of his infamous 'hill-side chats', teaching on things like divorce and loving one's enemies, summing it all up with the phrase, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect", what in the world do we do with that?

Maybe for you, one of the first phrases that comes to mind is a reverently snarky, "Yeah good luck with that!" Perfection is a nonstarter kind of expectation. Or is it?

Jenna did end up going to college, but not the one she or her parents had hoped for. She attended a sister school that fed into the big university. At the time it felt like a failure because her brothers had been accepted at the university their first try. But it actually turned out to be a rare blessing.

The community college where Jenna attended had much smaller class sizes. So she was able to actually know her professors, and they worked with her. And her good grades reflected that. It was through those relationships, in a place that was hers and hers alone, where Jenna discovered something her brothers had yet to learn. Namely, that it's okay to need help sometimes. In fact, one of the greatest signs of maturity and health, is knowing when to ask for help.

Jesus hasn't moved the mark. Perfection is the only thing that will do for someone like himself, who is actually perfect. And he also knows that such a standard is impossible for us to achieve. That's why he accomplished it for us. By dying and rising from the grave of our inability to please God, Jesus set a new mark.

A standard that's not about being good or perfect. But living as resurrected people - grateful, generous, gracious. Offering everyone (including ourselves) the good and perfect love of God that has chosen, for reasons that are still beyond us, to take up residence in we who are broken. That's not some high and mighty ideal. This can be our normal everyday routine. All we have to do - is ask Him for help.