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We live in an age of endless optimization. Everything from our morning routines to our work processes gets measured, refined, and perfected. Social media feeds us curated glimpses of flawless achievements, while productivity culture promises that the right system will finally make us successful enough to matter.

But this pursuit of perfection often backfires. As Leslie Jamison notes in "The Pain of Perfectionism," the drive toward flawless standards can be genuinely debilitating.¹ Instead of helping us contribute meaningfully, it can paralyze us—making us wait for ideal conditions that never come or causing us to abandon projects that don't meet impossible standards. We can forget the value of simply getting started, of learning as we go, of being genuinely helpful even when we're not flawless.

This summer we launched our first accessible camp with Rivers Edge in Alberta. Their Assistant Director was intimidated about getting everything "just right." I was worried that this instinct toward perfectionism might put the camp at risk. I encouraged him that even having a camp with the desire to support families with members with disabilities is an improvement from many camps that remain inaccessible. The camp took place in August, and I was invited to speak at it. There were some notes I made along the way about improvements for next year, but the heart and the quality of support were in place. One parent said, "Our experience was truly life changing. From the bottom of my heart I can't thank you enough for offering this camp experience." It wasn't perfect; it was *very good*.

This perfectionist trap isn't new. Theologian John Swinton reminds us that even in Eden, human beings were not "perfect." Good (tov in Hebrew) "does not imply perfection or uniformity but denotes relational integrity, aesthetic richness, diversity, and the capacity for fruitful, dynamic life and connection."²

¹ Jamison, Leslie. "The Pain of Perfectionism." The New Yorker, 11 Aug. 2025, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2025/08/11/the-pain-of-perfectionism>

² Swinton, John. "It Was 'Good,' Not Perfect." Christianity Today, Sept./Oct. 2025, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/2025/09/it-was-good-not-perfect/>.

Our work here at Karis Disability Services is important. It impacts people's lives, and excellence in the quality of our services is non-negotiable. We seek the good of people, setting the bar high while knowing people's lives and flourishing are at stake. We're not simply content with the status quo, either. We know that real flourishing requires growth and development.

That's why we strive towards excellence in measures like compliance while navigating the tensions and flexibility needed to meaningfully respond to people's changing needs, desires, and giftings. We as employees of Karis will need to think creatively at times and be innovative within a framework of responsible care and preparation.

Sometimes "very good" done together works better than striving for an impossible target. This approach leaves room for grace and creativity, allowing us to bring our whole selves to work—limitations included. We still do our best, plan, and prepare, but we can also try new things that might not go according to plan yet sometimes exceed our expectations.

Making the Connection

- Share about a time you planned for something, but it didn't quite go according to plan. What did you learn from it? Were other people able to help?
- Talk about a recent time your team tried something new or innovative. How did you address risks? How did it go? Did it lead to growth and development for someone?
- What are some of the ways you track your work, or the organization tracks these things? Why is it important to maintain quality even if we might not achieve "perfection?"

Check it out! Photos from the Rivers Edge Family camp can be found [here](#) and you can learn more about getting involved in a local family camp at <https://karis.org/familycamp>.