

Good Enough

December 31, 2020

Joel Stevens

Good Enough

We must, indeed, all hang together or, most assuredly, we shall all hang separately.

Benjamin Franklin

2020 has been a hard year—the pandemic, sickness and death of loved ones, social isolation, lost or erratic jobs, political insanity, social unrest, difficulties in relationships from all the stress of everything else—everyone has taken some kind of toll.

I had planned to write a different essay this year, but today, the right essay seems ‘good enough’.

Our poor *homo sapiens* brains are not very well equipped for modern life—they are easily manipulated (by others and ourselves), they constantly hold beliefs that aren’t true, they cannot intuitively deal with the social scale we now live in, and they all have idiosyncratic oddities to some extent, among a laundry list of other deficiencies no designer would ever want for the society and world we now live in. It is incredible how well we have done with what we have!

For some of us, our egos may tell us we are the perfect snowflake that is actually rational and good and right, and everyone else suffers the problems above—and may even need lectures on how they should do better!—but we are wrong (and if you are unconvinced, it is time to start self-reflecting, and if that isn’t working, then asking those around you will get you answers!). For others of us, we may feel the list applies even more to us than everyone else, and punish ourselves for our inability to be perfect. Some may even inexplicably hold both views!

So far, this all seems a bit bleak, but here is the silver lining: when we realize that neither we nor anyone else can be perfect, there is a calm place to rest in ‘good enough’. We can cut ourselves a break, and give ourselves room to make mistakes. Instead of self-flagellation, we can let the mistakes go and try to do better. We don’t have to live in the neurotic place of only perfection or failure.

Importantly though, we can do the same for others. All those people you disagree with and all those beliefs that you cannot understand stem from the same brain structure and processes that drive you, and they deserve the same compassion that you give to yourself. The angry person you can’t understand or the rude behavior that feels intolerable is not the whole of the person—it may be a hard day or a hard year or a hard life. Everyone is trying the best they can, and they deserve a little benefit of the doubt while they try to make it through this life, just as you do.

And for those that have the opposite problem (and there are plenty), if you can cut everyone else some slack, then you deserve it too!

2020 has been a year where the intensity has been ‘turned up to 11’, and the results are easy to see. Let’s try to reset and return to more normal levels—we can aim for better, but let’s let ‘good enough’ be good enough.

December 31, 2020