

Let's say I give you a saw and a tree branch and ask you to cut me a piece of wood 21 inches long. If you comply and hand me back the wood that you cut, how long will it be? That would depend on what type of saw I gave you, and how skilled you are at wielding that saw, and actually, how accurately the wood was measured before and after it was cut. I might say to you, "please cut me a length **about 21 inches long**" - that word "about" says a lot. Actually, it says, not very much. If I need that branch for firewood, then pretty much whatever you give back to me will work fine and "about" is an appropriate instruction. But if I need it as the 4th leg of a table, the dimensions need to be accurate so the table does not wobble. I would **not want to use the word "about" to describe the length of a table leg**. You might think I should ask for a piece "exactly" 21 inches long. But technically, that is not possible. There will always be some deviation from the target and some error in the measuring device. But thankfully, the length of the table leg can tolerate a certain error and still not wobble. If the table leg is within a 1/16 inch of the target, it will probably work fine. The leg can tolerate 1/16 inch of error. If the firewood is within a few inches, it will still burn, but if it is too long, it will hang outside the fire pit and could be dangerous. So, the firewood should have a higher, or looser tolerance. A low (or tight) tolerance is nice, but more difficult to achieve. **Generally speaking, maximizing the tolerance is a goal**; a high (or loose) tolerance may be easier to achieve, but if it is too loose, the function will suffer. Determining the proper tolerance range for a given situation is important.

Tolerance is not only applied to table legs, firewood, and physical things. **Some tolerances we simply accept and don't think about much**. Consider your personal tolerance for pain. The ability to tolerate more pain might be a good thing. Some argue that you can increase your tolerance to pain through mental exercise and meditation. But, if your tolerance of pain is too high, you may suffer serious injury without knowing and ignore it. What might feel like a little scratch could require stitches. There is someone I am close to who has a very low tolerance for bad smells, but personally, I do not. I will notice the smell and I can categorize it as "bad," but I can live with it more easily. I know someone that is pretty much universally considered "annoying." And some people will avoid being near that person at all costs. Others seem to be friends with them – someone actually married that annoying person! **What a great thing to have – a high tolerance for annoying people**. There are so many things in life that we have a tolerance for – noise, tickling, temperature, bright sunlight, out of tune pianos, crooked pictures hanging on the wall, messy rooms, violence, hatred, lying...

What about sin? What is your tolerance for sin? **We all have an inherent tolerance for "bending the rules."** A common example of that is (not) driving at the speed limit. Are you comfortable driving 5 or 10 miles per hour over the limit? We would like the table leg to be perfectly straight and have the exact length, but tolerance eases the burden and makes way for "straight enough and long enough."

"Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." (Matthew 5:48)

How far away from perfect is "good enough" when we talk of perfectly imitating Messiah?

For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; (1 Peter 2:21-23)

We are told to "be perfect" and to "follow in His steps, who committed no sin..." If the boss said "cut me a piece of wood exactly 21 inches long," would you argue with him and say "technically, that's impossible..."? Or would you **get out the good saw and triple check your measurement** and carefully

make the best cut you possibly can make? I would choose the second choice – and Hope that my accuracy fell within the boss’ tolerance.

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, (Romans 3:23)

God does not specify a tolerance that we must meet in our perfection because God does not have a tolerance range that is acceptable. **There is no “good enough.”** He needs the leg to be exactly 21 inches long. Exactly.

Your eyes are too pure to approve evil, And You cannot look on wickedness with favor. Why do You look with favor On those who deal treacherously? Why are You silent when the wicked swallow up Those more righteous than they? (Habakkuk 1:13)

But, before we argue with “technically, that’s not possible...” or say “that’s too hard, I’m not even going to try...” let’s consider some amazingly wonderful facts. If I cut the table leg too short, it will likely end up in the pile of firewood. Unless, **the boss is a highly skilled carpenter** and can fabricate a spacer, or a shim, to make up for the short leg! The above scripture in Romans continues:

being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; (Romans 3:24)

In attempting to hit an exact length, we will always end up cutting the table leg too short, but God’s gift of redemption can keep the short leg out of the firewood pile.

*But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, **even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:4-7)***

We need to get out the good saw, triple check our measurements and carefully make the best cut we can.

I can do all things through Him who strengthens me. (Philippians 4:13)

We need to make that cut again and again and again, improving our skill and accuracy.

Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary. (Galatians 6:9)

We need to seek out the advice and instruction of others who have more experience.

Where there is no guidance the people fall, But in abundance of counselors there is victory. (Proverbs 11:14)

As the Master Craftsman, God does specify a zero tolerance. Even though our efforts will fall short of that standard, He will still make a beautiful, sturdy table. As His apprentice, however, we should exercise humility and patience, effectively loosening our own tolerances. Ironically, by doing this, we will get closer to achieving the required perfection we strive for.

Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. (Colossians 3:2)

Peace to you and glory to God!

-Nate

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