

## COMBATING PERFECTIONISM

By Brenda Spina, M.S., LMFT, LPC

Perfectionism. What do you think of when you hear the word? I think of never making mistakes, completing tasks without having to redo parts, and not having any faults. There are some who think of it as doing our best or struggling for excellence, or a healthy striving for high goals.

Perfectionism is about believing that if we can just do something perfectly, other people will love and accept us. This includes God as well. When David realized that what God desired was honesty in the inward parts he was right. Psalm 103:14 reminds us, "He (God) knows how we are formed, He remembers that we are dust." These bodies we are in are not perfect and will never be perfect until we get our new body in heaven. Meanwhile, God knows and understands our limitations. We're created out of dust. We're susceptible to mistakes.

Perfectionism is relational. Perfectionism begins when we learn early in life that other people value you for how much you accomplish or achieve. This pattern becomes the external standard for our sense of self and for approval. Internally, the impact on our own attitudes about love and acceptance, success and failure maintains the environment of perfectionism. The result is they continue to attempt to live up to someone else's expectations of them. People who struggle with perfectionism had a parent/adult who never was completely happy with what they accomplished or how they performed. No matter what they did or how hard they tried, their parent/authority figure would find some fault in their work and show them how it could be done better.

At the base of this is Fear of failure. Perfectionists become afraid that they are failures as people and as children of God. In today's world people want to see the realness of God as he walk with us through all of our struggles. People are tired of hiding their struggles behind a false kind of performance. In reality, our real self stays hidden and we run the risk of becoming very isolated and lonely. Basing our worth on performance undermines the very acceptance we long for. Our Lord constantly tells us to 'fear not.' He is not asking us to be perfect but to be in relationship with Him. He wants us to embrace our humanness. His gift in return to each of us is unlimited grace and mercy as we grow in Him. Remember, only God is perfect.

When God is left out of the process we become so focused on our performance that we forget the relationship we can have with Him. We forget that we are sinners first, saved by God's grace. Are you living in fear of having to admit that you cannot be perfect? We know that God never gives us a spirit of fear, so if that fear is consuming you, it is not from God. True, God's desire is for us to grow to be like Him, but He isn't waiting to drop the boom on us when we fail to measure up perfectly. He knows that we are dust! He created us and understands us completely.

One underlying force in perfectionism might be pride. Pride is often the hidden force

behind our obsession to prove that we are perfect. Pride removes us from the awareness of our need for God. We may see ourselves as conscientious or hardworking. If the motivation is pride then we want others to look at us and see that we did something perfectly. When we are aware of our need for God our focus becomes honestly relating to Him and growing in our understanding of who He is. What others think of us is less important.

Following are some statements that can help us move from living in a state of fear-based perfectionism to living in a state of restfulness as God's child.

### **Combating Perfectionism Statements**

I am not the center of the universe, God is. (Psalm 103)

It does not say trouble free on my birth certificate.

Learning from my mistakes is what helps me grow in wisdom. (II Corinthians 3:5 states that our sufficiency is in God)

Being right about something does not make it sacred.

Many things in life are nice but not necessary. God's covering and blessing is the most important factor.

Lighten up and give yourself some slack. Even Jesus took a day of rest.

I can bear with anxiety – the Lord is with me.

Fear is a part of life – it is not bigger than life.

Doing things perfectly would be nice but not necessary.

If I achieved perfectionism most others would hate me for it.

To live imperfectly is to live in the awareness of my need for God

Adapted from Anti-Perfectionist Coping Statements by Bill Borchardt, ACSW

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Appleton, WI 54912  
(920) 720-8920  
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