



What Is Perfectionism?

- **Perfectionism** is an unhealthy, compulsive pattern of thinking that demands perfection in any undertaking.
 - Anything less than perfect is unacceptable.
 - No task is attempted unless perfection is attainable.

For example, Jesus tells the parable of the talents—money given to three men by their master to invest wisely. This consisted of eight talents—or eight pounds of gold—with each talent the equivalent of about 20 years worth of wages. While two servants doubled their investment, the third man hid his gold and said ...

“I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you”
(Matthew 25:25).
- **Perfectionists** appear confident, conscientious, and highly productive, but the truth is ...
 - They are full of self-doubt and fear that the slightest mistake or misstep will cause others to be disappointed in them or reject them.
 - They become overly sensitive to the opinions and feedback of others, often disregarding their own healthy instincts.

The Bible says ...

“People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7).
- **Perfectionists** live in an overly cautious way.
 - They are reluctant to try new tasks, take risks, or tackle big projects.
 - They fear failing or appearing “inadequate” in the eyes of others.

The Bible says ...

“Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power”
(Ephesians 6:10).

Problematic Patterns of Perfectionism

1. Legalism

A strict adherence to religious rules and regulations with the false hope of earning righteousness

Example: “If I don’t keep the dietary law of my church, I’ll be doomed.”

But the Bible says ... *“Do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day”* (Colossians 2:16).

2. Performance-based Acceptance

A belief that acceptance by God and others is based only on how much is achieved and how perfectly actions are performed

Example: “I must achieve great success in order for God and others to accept me.”

But the Bible says ... *“I will expose your righteousness and your works, and they will not benefit you”* (Isaiah 57:12).

3. Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder

An unhealthy, emotional imbalance characterized by persistent, excessive thoughts and inflexible, irrational behavior often in a drive for perfection

Example: “I must wash my hands again and again before I can ever enjoy eating.”

But the Bible says ... *“... eating with unwashed hands does not defile them”* (Matthew 15:20).

*“These people come near to me with their mouth
and honor me with their lips,
but their hearts are far from me.
Their worship of me is based on merely
human rules they have been taught.”*
(Isaiah 29:13)

Checklist of Classic Perfectionists

Do you ...

- Anticipate** that others are always trying to find fault with you?
- Assume** you must please everyone all the time?
- Avoid** conflict at all costs, believing that if there is conflict you must have done something wrong?
- Believe** if you are less than perfect, then you can lose your salvation?
- Consider** mistakes to never be permissible?
- Establish** goals so high that you continually stress over trying to achieve them?
- Expect** people close to you to know what you want without telling them?
- Find** it impossible to let go of a mistake?
- Hold** back and not take any risks because you are afraid of failure?
- Need** to have everything in its place—always?
- Presume** you must perform perfectly in order to gain and keep God's love?
- Put** all of your energy into living life to please others?
- Question** whether people would still love you if they really knew you?
- Set** a higher standard for yourself than you do for others?
- Spend** more time trying to be who you think others think you are rather than just being who you truly are?
- Suppose** that making a mistake diminishes your value?
- Wonder** why everyone doesn't act the same way you do ... because your way is the "right" way?

*"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened,
and I will give you rest."
(Matthew 11:28)*

God's Heart on Perfectionism

Freedom from perfectionism begins at the point of truth. Regularly repeating these 10 messages will set the wheels of change in motion in your life.

1. "I don't always have to measure up ... because no one is perfect." (Romans 3:23)
2. "I never have to fear losing God's love as a result of anything I might or might not do ... because His love is unconditional." (Romans 8:38–39)
3. "I have a clear conscience and am free from guilt and regret over past failures ... because I have been forgiven by God and have been given the righteousness of Christ." (Isaiah 43:18–19)

4. "I can live without fear of being condemned even when I fail to meet the expectations of others ... because God has accepted me in Christ." (Romans 8:15)
5. "I can stop comparing myself to others ... because God designed me to be a unique, one-of-a-kind person." (Psalm 139:14)
6. "I can confidently take on new challenges ... because with Christ in me I'm not limited to doing only those things at which I excel." (Proverbs 3:26 ESV)
7. "I don't have to worry about finding the perfect job or selecting the ideal situation ... because I can trust God to prepare the way for my future." (Ephesians 2:10)
8. "I am free to enjoy life ... because God has freed me from bondage to a set of rules and regulations." (John 8:36)
9. "My salvation is a free gift ... because it's not based on what I deserve or earn through my work or other achievements." (2 Timothy 1:9)
10. "God does not expect me to become Christlike in my own power ... because God assumes responsibility for bringing me to maturity." (Philippians 1:6)

Key Verse to Memorize

*"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you.
I do not give to you as the world gives.
Do not let your hearts be troubled
and do not be afraid."
(John 14:27)*

Key Passage to Read

Philippians 3:3–14

Managing Time

- Spend time with God ... in His Word and in prayer. (Psalm 119:16)
- Write a "To-Do" list daily—preferably the evening before. Make it realistic and reflective of your priorities. (Proverbs 16:1, 3)
- List your detailed plans in order of importance. Remember the benefit of doing them with diligence. (Proverbs 21:5)
- Establish a starting and finishing time for each task. Stick to your time schedule so that one activity does not take time allotted to another. (Ecclesiastes 3:1)
- Set parameters on having an open-door policy in order to ensure "alone time." Guard your time with God just as Jesus protected His time with the Father. (Matthew 14:23)

- Set aside specific time for family, for friends, and for yourself. There is great reward in planning activities with loved ones. (Proverbs 14:22)

*“The wise heart will know
the proper time and procedure.
For there is a proper time
and procedure for every matter,
though a person may be
weighed down by misery.”*
(Ecclesiastes 8:5–6)

How to Accept the Lord’s Acceptance

- Evaluate your extremes. (Philippians 4:5)
- Expect discomfort. (Ephesians 4:22–24)
- Stop comparing. (2 Corinthians 10:12)
- Abolish expectations. (Romans 12:10)
- Laugh at your mistakes. (Proverbs 15:15; 17:22)
- Practice patience. (Ephesians 4:29)
- Just say *no*. (John 7:3, 8)
- Grow in grace. (2 Peter 3:18)
- Don’t be so demanding. (Galatians 2:16)

- Be accepting. (Romans 15:7)
- Condemn no more. (Romans 8:1)
- Cancel your performance. (Philippians 4:11–13)

Find Freedom

Fulfill your God-given call to live under grace, not under law. (Galatians 4:8–9)

Release your burden of guilt to God. (Hebrews 10:22)

Eliminate your need to please others and focus on pleasing God. (Micah 6:8)

Enlarge your time for rest, recreation, and communion with the Lord. (Exodus 33:14)

Decide to acknowledge your personal feelings honestly and release all resentment. (Job 36:13)

Obey your Savior’s mandate to live by the law of love rather than by the law of fear and perfectionism. (1 John 4:18)

Maintain your sense of significance and satisfy your need for security by finding and living out of your identity in Christ. (Galatians 2:20)

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