

July 7, 2019

Love 301: "Cultivating Self-Compassion and Letting Go of Perfectionism"

Exodus 4:10,12

Galatians 6:11

2 Corinthians 12:9

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We are on the second week of a ten-week series entitled Wholehearted Living. Last week we looked at cultivating authenticity and letting go of what people say about you.

Today, we will look at what does it mean to cultivate **self-compassion and let go of perfectionism.**

So, before you completely check out on this sermon due to you not seeing yourself as a perfectionist. Let's take researcher Brene Brown's word on it when she concludes that perfectionism exists along a continuum.

In other words, **we all have perfectionist tendencies** whether they show up episodically or chronically.

Since, you can't grab ahold of something, if your hands are full; let's begin with letting go of perfectionism.

What is perfectionism and what is it not.

- Perfectionism is **not about healthy achievement** and growth. Rather, it is **the belief that if we live perfect**, look perfect, and act perfect we can minimize or avoid the pain of blame, judgment, and shame.
- Perfectionism is **not self-improvement.** Perfectionism is, at its core, about **trying to earn approval and acceptance.** The truth is most

perfectionists were raised being praised for achievement and performance (grades, manners, rule-following, people pleasing, appearance, sports) Perfectionism is **not the same thing as striving to be your best**. Research shows perfectionism hampers success.

Somewhere along the way, perfectionists adopt this dangerous and debilitating belief system: **I am what I accomplish and how well I accomplish it**.

Please. Perform. Perfect.

In contrast, **healthy striving is self-focused** – How can I improve? **Perfectionism is other-focused** – What will they think?

Perfectionism is self-destructive.

Self-destructive simply because **there is no such thing as perfect**. Perfection is **an unattainable goal**. And, is not perfectionism more about perception. Thus, this too is unattainable because there is **no way to control perception**, regardless of how much time and energy we spend trying.

The fear of feeling shamed, judged, and blamed are realities of the human experience. Perfectionism does not protect you from having these feelings.

So, enough of the problems and now onto some solutions: First, to overcome perfectionism, we need to be able to **acknowledge our vulnerabilities to the universal experience of shame, judgment, and blame**; and thus, **develop some shame resilience; and practice self-compassion**. These two things will help us **embrace our**

imperfections and find our truest gifts: courage, compassion, and connection.

Two more important factors in overcoming our perfectionism is **exploring our fears and changing our self-talk.**

Can we dare to speak about our imperfections in a tender and honest way, and without shame and fear?

Can we operate in a way (when it comes to **ourselves and others**) by **thinking (and maybe even saying) “We’re all doing the best we can.”**

Enough on letting go of perfectionism and now onto **cultivating self-compassion.** Dr. Kristin Neff is a researcher and professor who studies self-compassion. Here is what she has found out:

- that being **warm and understanding toward ourselves** when we suffer, fail, or feel inadequate is important and **ignoring our pain or flagellating ourselves with self-criticism does not move us forward.**
- **Suffering and feelings of personal inadequacy are part of the shared human experience;** something we all go through, rather than it just happens to me alone– it comes with being human!
- Pay attention to **negative emotions.** They should not be suppressed or exaggerated. Be mindful **not to over-identify with thoughts and feelings,** so that we are **caught up and swept away by negativity.**

Perfectionism never happens in a vacuum. It **touches everyone around us.** We pass it down to our children, we

infect our workplace with impossible expectations, and it suffocates our friends and families. The good news is that **compassion also spreads quickly. When we're kind to ourselves, we create a reservoir of compassion that extends to others.** Our children learn how to be self-compassionate by watching us, and the people around us feel free to be authentic and connected.

Let me conclude with a few words about **two Biblical figures that illustrate for us what it means to let go of perfection and cultivate self-compassion.** The first is the **apostle Paul.** The book of Galatians was dictated to a scribe. Yet, when it came to the end of his 2,500+ word letter, Paul decided to pen the last 121 words himself. So, he says, "see the large letters". Like who could miss it; when the papyrus arrived at the church in Galatia. In other words, Paul was a pretty good apostle, he was a great author who used by God, but had **lousy handwriting.** He indeed may be one of the most famous and well read authors of all time. He recognized this was not his strong suit, content was, and thus used a scribe like Luke or Timothy, or Silvanus. We know not who for sure. Yet, we know Paul was **used mightily by God; despite his F in penmanship.** Maybe **Paul was a recovering perfectionist and then became a good enoughist.**

And then we have Moses, whom God asked to lead God's people out of slavery. To which Moses replies, "I am not eloquent, for I have a heavy mouth and tongue (the exact words used in Hebrew). Many scholars believe **Moses had a speech impediment, others are sure he was a stutterer.** Yet, God used Moses as **one of the greatest leaders in history.** So, Moses utilized Aaron as a spokesperson, but it was **Moses who told Aaron what to say.** Maybe Moses was a

recovering perfectionist and then became a good enoughist.

As God did for them, God will do for us. God will use us in a mighty way - imperfections and all. So, **just showing up, it will be more than enough!**