



Brown Community Group Discussion Guide

7 Deadly Characteristics to Your Godly Peace, Joy and Contentment

March 15, 2020 Lesson 3

As we continue our series today with the **"7 Deadly Characteristics to Your Godly Peace, Joy and Contentment"** we will be focusing primarily on Perfectionism. You will remember from last two weeks, we initially set up and reviewed Godly Peace, Joy and Contentment. It was critical for us to reach biblical agreement as to what we are striving to attain through Christ before we can fully understand the detrimental impact of each of the 7 Deadly Characteristics. Each of these characteristics can and will totally destroy your Christian Spirit and God's ability to work through you for a Victorious, Peaceful and Content Christian Life:

1. Perfectionism
2. Comparisons
3. Pride
4. Selfishness (Your relationship with God and what serves as its basis)
5. Competiveness With Wrongly Placed Motives
6. Not Recognizing and Using Your God Given Spiritual Gifts
7. Control

As we have spent time to date defining and studying how God has set out a plan for us to achieve those Spiritual conditions, we need to remind ourselves that this whole series is about each of us **Freeing our Heart, Mind, Body and Soul!**

A. **What is Perfectionism?**

Let's start our examination of Perfectionism and the motives behind it with a couples of comments:

- "I try so hard to "do good". I try so hard to keep everyone happy. I try so hard to keep things in order, to make others feel good, to do things the right way, to be all that I can be – and to be who others want to see. I try and I try and I try, but, I fell as if I fail and fail. It can be tiring and leave you worn out, discouraged and wishing you could be better. Even worse, we notice that in pursuit of perfection, we tend to hurt others. **It is all too common when simple "words of feedback" through a perfectionist lenses turn into living giants of criticism.** They come and tower over us with pointed fingers, telling me that I am not "good enough", "talented enough" or "wise enough". They push me to strive harder and reinforce the idea that I am failing.
- When I look, critique or judge things done by others I feel as if they are hardly ever done "correctly", "satisfactorily", "completed" or to "my standard". Hardly anything is right. We have to ask ourselves, what defines "perfect or correct"? You and your way only? Nothing in this world is perfect, we cannot control everything, set everything, make or drive perfection, so why do we set this unachievable standard for ourselves and then let it drive our satisfaction, joy and "happiness" based upon this standard. If this is us, then we have a problem and suffer from perfectionism.
- Some might say perfectionism is a good thing, biblical even ("Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" Matthew 5:48) but when you read the definition you realize just how messed up it is.
 - **Perfectionism is a disposition to regard anything short of perfection as unacceptable, especially the setting of unrealistically demanding goals accompanied by a disposition to regard failure to achieve them as unacceptable and a sign of personal worthlessness.**
 - The true nature of perfectionism is a trap and a lie that we earn and set out self-worth based on our actions, behaviors and outcomes. While it is always good to strive for excellence and to

grow to your potential, we should be careful in viewing our goals as a way to prove your worth. Perfectionism is striving for worthiness or to earn love by accomplishing goals or avoiding failure.

When we seek to set self-worth of ourselves or others through their actions or results, we will fail and suffer the consequences of Perfectionism. There is only One who defines worth and that worth is found only in Him and not any action or result from others. God writes the definition of who we are – and why we are. As His children, we are loved and fully accepted regardless of the degree of “Perfection” we believe we possess. Our “Perfect Actions and Expectations” will earn us nothing in God’s sight and are as filthy rags.

God’s glory surpasses our expectations and wildest dreams. But, we miss seeing it when our mind is focused on our Perfectionism. **His glory unfolds in the midst of weakness, our imperfection and all of our mess. God is greater than “our perfect”. He shows up in our faults. He is present in our weaknesses. Christ makes my imperfect – perfect.** Perfect in Him, as I trust Him.

B. Bible Verses for Perfectionists

“It is God who arms me with strength and makes my way perfect” (Psalm 18:32)

- His strength is power, not our attempt to be perfect.

“Because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy” (Hebrews 10:14)

- We are being made holy though an eternal work in process.

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God (Eph. 2:8)

- Grace is always ours, even when we fail.

I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well. (Psalm 139:14)

- He made us beautifully exactly as He desired, we must accept and believe this.

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

- We are not perfect, never will be and should not expect that in others. Only Jesus is, so why are we holding others and ourselves to that impossible standard and then letting our joy and happiness be driven by that!

But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. (2 Cor. 12:9)

- Let us be weak so that we can then be strong in Him.

God doesn’t view our weaknesses or faults as obstacles to closeness with him; he sees them as opportunities for growth as he loves us.

C. Perfectionism Explained

What we call *perfectionism* is not the same as the pursuit of excellence, though sometimes the lines can blur. When we pursue excellence, we’re determined to do something as well as possible within a given set of talent, resource, and time limits. But **perfectionism is a pride or fear based compulsion** that either fuels

our obsessive fixation on doing something perfectly or paralyzing us from acting at all — both of which often result in the harmful neglect of other necessary items or people.

What's behind our perfectionistic tendencies? We're complex beings, so it's rarely just one thing. Perfectionism nearly always has its roots in our desire for acceptance and fear of rejection. It can be pride-fueled, general fear of what people will think of us, or it can be a crippling, conditioned fear of failing instilled into us by an abusive past or present authority figure. Here are a few reasons to consider that can drive perfectionism:

1. "You Must Be Perfect"

But to understand and believe this, we must first understand something Jesus said that sounds contradictory: "You must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" ([Matthew 5:48](#)). This sure sounds like a demand for perfection on the face of it. The key to what Jesus meant, and the key to our liberation from the tyranny of perfectionism is because Jesus perfectly lived, died, and rose again for us, he has already purchased our perfection. In God's eyes, we have been perfected by virtue of being joined to Jesus by faith, which frees us from needing to earn his or anyone else's approval through perfectionism.

2. Imperfect Saints Fill the Bible

The Bible nowhere encourages us toward perfectionism. It promises us perfection — imputed perfection now ([2 Corinthians 5:21](#)) and future perfection in the age to come ([Revelation 21:3-4](#)) — as a free gift of God's grace, so that we will be free from perfectionism. God knows our perfectionistic temptations and tendencies, and so he fills the Bible with stories of his amazing and phenomenally patient grace toward sinners who continued to imperfectly fight with, and stumble in, their sin throughout their earthly sojourns. He wants us to know that perfection in behavior and motivation is completely out of our experiential reach in this age.

3. Live Free from Perfectionism

God has something far better for us to strive toward than our idealized imaginations of perfection, which only end up enslaving us. Perfectionism's subtle, but great danger is its self-orientation. Since it is a fear- or pride-fueled effort to win approval for the self, its primary focus is *de facto* on self, not God or others. In other words, perfectionism, even in the battle against sin, is not motivated by love or faith. God wants us to be free — free from the tyranny of pride and fear. In our ongoing battles with sin, God is not looking for perfect behavior or perfect motivation from us. God is looking for love and faith, knowing full well both will be imperfect.

4. You Are Free to Fight Imperfectly

God is calling us to the wonderfully refreshing experience of getting our eyes off ourselves and how we're measuring up, and onto Jesus ([Hebrews 12:2](#)). He wants us to stop pursuing or being paralyzed by perfectionism so we are free to pursue love ([1 Corinthians 14:1](#); [1 Timothy 1:5](#)) and pursue trusting him with all our hearts ([Proverbs 3:5](#)).

5. Personal Battles

A story about one individual that may be all too common:

I was being tormented by the tyrant of perfectionism. My to-do lists were pages long, my calendar was booked with coffee dates and obligations, and I worried incessantly about what might happen if I let just one thing slip or couldn't be a best friend to every person in my life. I was not happy. The problem was this - I just couldn't give up that feeling of satisfaction I experienced when I would accomplish something or receive an accolade. I sensed that I couldn't

keep this frenzied pace for long, but I had a major dilemma. My worth was totally wrapped up in this lie that if I could just squeeze out one more perfect project, make it to the top of one more person's list of favorites, and above all not say or do the wrong thing, I would be worthy of love and acceptance. It drove me to exhaustion. I just couldn't keep that pace anymore. With a lot of support from my closest friends I finally admitted that I had a problem, and began the journey of salvaging my life back from the grips of perfectionism. Not everyone's struggle with perfectionism involves a fear that they won't be loved; but at the root however, perfectionism is often a disguise for insecurity.

D. Practical and Spiritual Things We Can Do About It?

1. Acknowledge the temptation.

Whether or not you struggle with it, it's important to know that our culture is full of chronic perfectionism. It seems to be bred into our American souls. As we strive for our sanctification growth in Christ, Satan can convince you that you will become unworthy of God's love if you aren't perfect. Beware of unrealistic goals and even start asking, "am I doing this thing or striving for that because I'm trying to prove my worthiness or cover up an insecurity?"

2. Accept the reality of failure.

It's ok to fail. I know it doesn't feel like it, I know you don't want to, but it's ok. You can fail and still be loved, you can fail and still be worthy of love, and believe it or not, failure can actually be a good thing. When we fail we are given the opportunity to affirm the reality that we are human "beings". Failure also gives us the chance to ask for help and to rely more fully on God and others.

3. Meditate on God's love for you.

John's writings are anecdotes for perfectionism since they are brimming with reminders of God's love for you and all of the ways that He proves that love. Spend some time reading John's gospel or his letters, write down a favorite verse and let it remind you that you are worthy because God believes that you were worth dying on the cross for.

4. Honor and celebrate your successes.

While this might seem counterintuitive, a key contributor to severe perfectionism is failure to take the time to acknowledge your successes. We should not check things off your list and rush to the next. There needs to be time for reflection and gratitude. When we practice reflection and gratitude we begin to see that we are worthy because we are loved by God, and He is allowing us to participate with Him in this life.

5. Set realistic expectations.

Remember that *setting unrealistically demanding goals* can quickly set us into a tailspin of perfectionism.

6. Pray.

Pray and "meditate on God's love". We must immerse ourselves in God's perfection in order to be healed of our perfectionism. Spend time praying in gratitude for God's love and mercy and asking Him to show you how He sees you.

E. Questions for Small Group Discussion:

1. Discuss the differences in Perfectionism Verses Pursuit of Excellence? What are the key attributes of each?
2. Why would "Pride, Fear Based Compulsion" or "Sign of Personal Worthiness" be main attributes of Perfectionism?

3. Perfectionism can cause behaviors on both ends of extremes 1) Obsessive fixation on doing everything perfectly or 2) Paralyzing us from making any decision or action for fear of failure.
 - a. Discuss each behavior and why?
 - b. How strongly do you believe our desire to be accepted and fear of rejection drive these decisions?
4. Talk about the effects on other people when we make “perfectionism” comments or attitudes about their behavior, decisions or results?
5. From the definition of “Perfectionism”, have you known or been around people who regard anything short of perfection as unacceptable? Discuss and talk about specific examples in your lives without names.
6. As a Christian, discuss how you reconcile the following scriptures as it relates to our “Perfectionism”:
 - a. “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48)
 - b. *“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.” (2 Cor. 12:9)*