

Prisoners of Perfectionism . . .

International Women's tennis has become incredibly popular in the last few years. But the personal stories of the champions reveal a sad and consistent trait: how many of the young women—some just teenagers—are pushed to perform by domineering fathers. Yugoslavian Jelena Dokic, French Mary Pierce, German Steffi Graf, and Americans Venus and Serena Williams have all suffered at the hands of fathers, who were criminal, abusive, lying, or domineering in their quests for their daughters' perfection. These young women were made to feel that any failure to achieve would result in the loss of their father's love.¹

Have you ever been made to feel that way?

*"He [God] has said,
I will never leave you nor forsake you."
(Hebrews 13:5)*

*"God calls you to be a pursuer of excellence,
not a prisoner of perfectionism."*

—June Hunt

Q: "Aren't Christians called to be perfect?"

Christians are to aim for maturity, wholeness, and completeness.

Wrong: "Christians are expected to be perfect—faultless and flawless."

Right: Christians are expected to be perfect—mature and whole.

*"You therefore must be perfect,
as your heavenly Father is perfect."
(Matthew 5:48)*

Q: "What is the difference between being perfectionistic and aiming for excellence?"

Perfectionists feel defeated if they are found at fault in any area. However, Christians are called to rise over and above immaturity, to excel in maturity.

*"Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."
(James 1:4 NIV)*

Q: "Doesn't everyone want a perfectionistic doctor or lawyer or employee?"

No. When new approaches are needed, perfectionists are less flexible to try new ideas or procedures. No matter what our occupation, we are to do our work as though we are working for the Lord.

*"Whatever you do, work heartily,
as for the Lord and not for men."
(Colossians 3:23)*

Behavioral Characteristics of Perfectionists²

The essential feature of perfectionism is *compulsive* behavior, which results from an insecure need to “go beyond the call of duty.”

Controls environment, situations, and others³

Objects to criticism and correction

Majors on the minors

Procrastinates

Underestimates time needed to complete tasks

Lacks joy and creativity

Sacrifices relationships for projects

Imagines rejection from others

Vacillates in making decisions

Expresses intolerance toward others

“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.”
(Romans 8:1–2)

God’s Messages of Grace

Replace perfectionistic thinking patterns with the liberating power of God’s truth.

1. “I don’t always have to measure up—no one is perfect.” (Romans 3:23)
2. “I never have to fear losing God’s love because of anything I might or might not do.” (Romans 8:38–39)
3. “I can stop comparing myself to others because God designed me to be unique . . . a one-of-a-kind person.” (Psalm 139:14)
4. “I can confidently take on new challenges. I’m not limited to doing only those things at which I excel.” (Proverbs 3:26)
5. “I am free to enjoy life. God doesn’t want me in bondage to a set of rules and regulations.” (John 8:36)

Key Verse to Memorize

“I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”
(John 15:5)

Key Passage to Read and Reread

Philippians 3:1–14

Excel in Grace

Evaluate your extremes. (Luke 10:38–42)

X-pect discomfort. (1 Peter 4:12)

Cease all comparison. (2 Corinthians 10:12)

Eliminate unrealistic expectations. (Luke 6:35)

Learn to laugh at your own mistakes. (Proverbs 15:15; 17:22)

Identify your impatience with others. (1 Thessalonians 5:14)

Notice your need to say no. (1 Corinthians 6:12)

Grow in grace. (2 Peter 3:18)

Rid yourself of the rules. (Galatians 3:3)

Acept God’s full acceptance. (Romans 15:7)

Cancel condemnation. (Romans 8:1)

Exchange your efforts for dependence on Christ’s power. (2 Corinthians 12:9)

“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”
(Romans 8:1)

Freedom from the Prison of Performance

Target Your Tendencies. (Psalm 139:23–24)

- Ask the Lord to reveal your demanding ideals.

Find Pockets of Perfectionism.⁴ (1 Peter 5:7)

- Is orderliness necessary for you to relax?
- Is punctuality a must?

Face Your Feelings.⁵ (Psalm 25:17)

- Feel the pain of your past.

Commit to Change. (Hebrews 12:1)

- Eliminate unrealistic expectations of yourself and others.

Master Your Mind. (Romans 12:2)

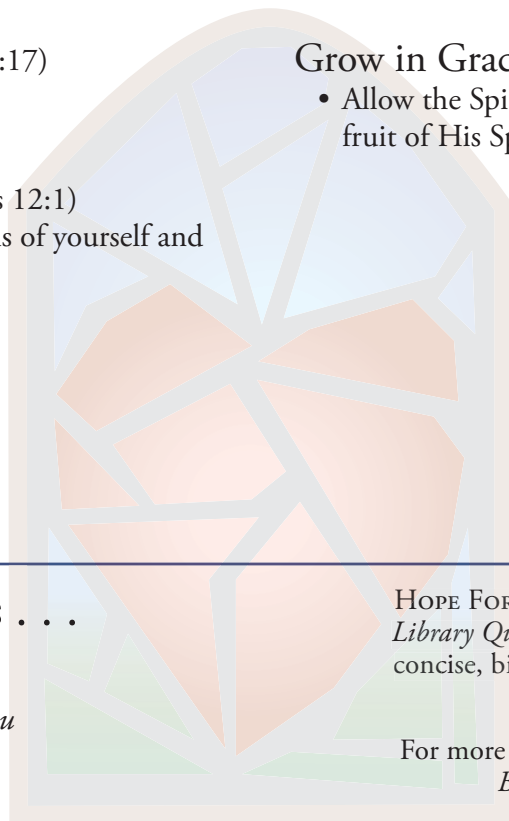
- Pray daily for God's intervention to help you take charge of your thoughts.

Lose Your Life. (2 Peter 1:3–4)

- Surrender your demands to have things your way.

Grow in Grace. (Galatians 5:22–23)

- Allow the Spirit of Christ within you to produce the fruit of His Spirit.



Related Topics . . .

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1. Alex Duval Smith, "Crossing the line," *Independent, The (London)*, August 7, 2003, http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qn4158/is_20030807/ai_n12706864 (accessed December 4, 2006).

2. For this section see Miriam Adderholdt and Jan Goldberg, *Perfectionism: What's Bad About Being Too Good?* rev. and updated ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit, 1999), 22–26, 30, 44–45, 52, 61.

3. See David A. Stoop, *Living with a Perfectionist* (Nashville: Oliver-Nelson, 1987), 36.

4. Stoop, *Living with a Perfectionist*, 26–28.

5. See Adderholdt and Goldberg, *Perfectionism*, 91; Stoop, *Living with a Perfectionist*, 112–21.



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