

I. Introduction

- A. Welcome to Neighborhood. A big shout out to our students in Jr. High and Sr. High today for Worship Together Weekend.
- B. Today is part 8 in our series called Illusions.
 - 1. An illusion is something you think is true but it isn't true.
 - 2. An illusion is something you think is beautiful but it isn't beautiful.
- C. The world around us is twisted. It's messed up. It has a twisted view of truth, a twisted view of human nature, and a twisted view of right and wrong. It's deceptive. It's not real.
- D. So we've been looking at different philosophies and viewpoints and showing where they make sense and where they don't make sense.
- E. *The illusion for today is PERFECTIONISM.*
 - 1. *Three Questions About Perfectionism*
 - a) What is Perfectionism?
 - b) What are some features of Perfectionism?
 - c) What does God say to My Inner Perfectionist?

II. Three questions:

- A. *What is perfectionism?*
 - 1. *Perfectionism is the fear the consequences of not being perfect and all the ways that fear freezes your growth and hurts your relationships.*
 - 2. Perfectionism is a fear, and then how that fear oozes out through all your pores, and stops you from trying stuff.
 - 3. When I was a kid, I played Little League Baseball. I was a great fielder, and a lousy batter. I could run down any fly ball in center field. But I couldn't hit the ball. Actually, that's not quite right.
 - 4. I didn't hit the ball, because I didn't swing the bat.
 - 5. There's adorable little Billy, maybe 8 or 9 years old, up at bat. I just stood there and hoped for a walk. I refused to swing my bat.
 - 6. The nice thing was that it was little league, so half the time I got a walk, which was a 50% on base percentage.
 - 7. All the other kids were standing there cheering for me. Come Bill, just try. Just swing the bat!
 - 8. After a couple of at bats, the other teams knew they could stand around and wait. The put on the pansy shift, which means the fielders all came in close. I remember one time, when a third baseman sat down on his glove.
 - 9. Yeah, that was special.
 - 10. Then I would go home to my Dad, who had played pro-baseball in the minor leagues for the Cubs, and he would ask how I did. And I would say one walk and one strikeout or whatever.
 - 11. I was always glad that my dad hardly ever came to games. Not because I didn't love him, but because I was afraid of letting him down.
 - 12. One author reached out on social media, to ask for examples of perfectionism. The response was overwhelming. How about a small sample:
 - a) Doing all the household chores because that way they will be done right. Then feeling resentful because no one ever offers to help and here she is, doing all the work herself. (C.S. Lewis named this person "Mrs. Fidget.")
 - b) Rearranging the dishes in the dishwasher to her standards.
 - c) After my mother vacuumed the living room floor, if she found footprints in the carpet, she lined us up and measured our feet to the prints. The culprit was made to bear the shame of messing up her hard work and had to re-vacuum the floor.
 - d) Correcting details in your wife's stories.
 - e) Never letting your kid hammer a nail because they won't let it go in right.
 - (1) People with perfectionism have a look of disapproval frozen on their face.
 - f) People who drive in the fastest lane and go exactly the speed limit, trying to control others' behavior (there's a hot spot in hell for those people).
 - g) Staying up all night to clean for a party because someone might see one speck of dirt, or one thing out of place (as if someone is going to look in every corner of your house).
 - 13. There were a bunch of religious perfectionists in Jesus' day. They were hyper religious people called Pharisees. One day, they tested Jesus.
 - a) *Jesus returned to the Mount of Olives, but early the next morning he was back again at the Temple. A crowd soon gathered, and he sat down and taught them. As he was speaking, the teachers of religious law and Pharisees brought a woman they had caught in the act of adultery. They put her in front of the crowd. "Teacher," they said to Jesus, "this woman was caught in the very act of adultery. The*

law of Moses says to stone her. What do you say?" They were trying to trap him into saying something they could use against him, but Jesus stooped down and wrote in the dust with his finger. (John 8:1-6, NLT)

14. So here is a test. This woman has failed. She has failed the test of moral perfection, and the penalty is death.

15. Let's hold off on what happens next.

B. What are some features of perfectionism?

1. VARIETIES: Different kinds of fear make different kinds of perfectionism.

a) It's a variety pack.

(1) *Fear of Rejection.* This fear never goes away. But it's really hard in your teens and twenties. Do you know how hard it is to ask someone out on a date?

(a) If somebody asks you out, and the answer is no, be nice. Let them down easy. Hello, my name is Movies, will you to go the John with me?

(b) Your looks, your complexion, your hair, your body shape, your grades, your popularity, how athletic.

(c) It's a crazy painful game, and everybody's playing it.

(2) *Fear of Failure.* That was me and baseball.

(3) *Fear of Losing Face.* That is still me and dancing. And public singing. And preaching. and just about everything else.

(4) *Fear of Losing Control.* Produces control freaks.

(5) *Fear of Not Fitting In.*

(6) *Fear of Loss, of Poverty, of Relapsing to your old ways.*

(7) *Fear of germs.* (Monk, Felix Unger)

(8) *Fear of Exposure, Fear of Public Humiliation.* That's what the woman felt when he dragged her to Jesus and threw her on the ground. Public humiliation.

b) These are the fears that make people overcompensate. They make people work themselves to death trying to achieve the impossible. These fears wear a thousand masks.

c) And I want to say, these fears are real. These fears are powerful. These fears make sense. You are not ungodly or evil if you live with these fears.

d) And God isn't mad at you.

e) Whatever look of disapproval you sense on the face of the perfectionists in your life, that is not the look on God's face when he thinks of you. God loves you, and if you have Jesus, God approves of you just as much as he approves of Jesus Christ.

2. QUEST: Humans have been longing for perfection ever since the Garden of Eden.

a) When God created humans, he created us with our own kind of perfection. Perfect health. Perfect bodies. Perfect hair. Perfect complexion. Perfect minds. Perfect morality. Perfect love.

b) No fears. No masks. No straining and sweating to try to fit in. No controlling behaviors.

c) Just pure joy and innocence and love in the perfection of God's original creation.

(1) *And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed. (Genesis 2:25, NKJV).*

d) We have no way of knowing how many years or even centuries that perfection lasted in the Garden of Eden. But we do know Adam and Eve had one terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day.

e) Adam and Eve threw a giant rock through the window of perfection, and all that perfection shattered into a million pieces. That rock is called sin.

f) Sin is the root. And all the fears and mess with your tiny little brain grow out of that original sin on that horrible day. The whole human race was messed up. Everybody.

g) Yes, you perfect people too. You were messed up.

h) Paradise Lost. It's called the Fall.

i) In the Fall, humans lost our perfection and we have been longing for it ever since.

j) And that's a problem because...

3. IMPOSSIBLE: Perfectionists spin their wheels in the pursuit of the impossible.

a) Paradise lost doesn't become paradise regained until Jesus returns. When he returns, he will reverse the curse of sin. He will yank it out of our beings by the root. And he will restore all the original awesomeness that was lost in the fall.

b) Until then, pimples happen. You miss the winning shot. You get rejected by the person of your dreams. And the dog poops on your favorite rug.

(1) *I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world." (John 16:33, NLT).*

c) What did Jesus say you will have in this world?

- d) Many trials and sorrows. Sorry. Aren't you glad you came to church?
- e) It's a tough world.
- f) And what makes it tougher is the illusion that you can make the tough stuff go away.
 - (1) You're going to strike out. You're going to be embarrassed. You're going to mess up. You're going to fail the comparison test. You're going to feel ignored on social media. You're going to lose money. You're going to have relationship problems. You're going to deal with all the pains of a fallen, broken, messed up world. You're going to get yelled at. You're going to get interrupted by weirdoes. You're going to lose face. You're going to smell bad. You're going to get a germ on your food. You're going to have a messy house. You're going to fail a test. You're going to hit the wrong note really loud (I know, loudly). You're going to get flabby or bony or tired or weak. You're going to get caught in a sin, just like the lady who was dragged before Jesus.
- g) And you can't control it all away. And you can't wash it all away. And you can't slap on a smiley face and pretend it away.
- h) You can't even pray it away.
 - (1) Say it with me:
 - (2) *I live as an imperfect person surrounded by imperfect people in a radically imperfect world.*
 - (a) *And God loves me anyway.*

4. *RESULT: The main result of perfectionism is putting Judgement and Condemnation at the Core of your emotions and your relationships.*

- a) It's condemnation because nobody can live up to perfect standards.
- b) Perfectionism is negativity in overdrive. It sees Jedi power zaps going in three directions:
 - (1) *I condemn myself.* These are the labels you put on yourself. I'm ugly. I don't matter. I'm worthless. I'm not good enough. If I fail nobody will be my friend.
 - (2) *Other people condemn me.* These are the labels other people put on you. Some are real, some are imagined. They think I'm horrible (maybe they don't).
 - (3) *I condemn you.* This is how a perfectionist makes life bearable. If you focus enough on other people's failures, maybe your failures won't be feel bad. This is a critical spirit.
- c) And all of this drives people away from you. Which in a very sad way just might be the goal, because the devil has you convinced you can be safe that way. To love is to risk. To live is to risk. And it is better to try than to out of fear of failure not try at all.

C. *What does God say to my Inner Perfectionist?*

1. Comments

- a) There is Jesus. And there is a crowd of perfectionists around Jesus. And there is a woman, at his feet. Imperfect in ways that every single person knows. No where to run. No where to hide. She is humiliated. She is afraid.
- b) What does Jesus say to that crowd, and what does Jesus say to that painfully imperfect person?
 - (1) To the crowd, he says this:
 - (a) *They kept demanding an answer, so he stood up again and said, "All right, stone her. But let those who have never sinned throw the first stones!" Then he stooped down again and wrote in the dust.*
 - (b) *When the accusers heard this, they slipped away one by one, beginning with the oldest, until only Jesus was left in the middle of the crowd with the woman. (John 8:7-9, NLT).*
- c) All the perfectionists dropped their stones and went away.
- d) Why? Because Jesus simply reminded them of their own imperfections. It really is a beautiful story.
- e) All those voices in your head, are in every head at one time or another. And you're not weird, and you're not horrible, and you're not worthless, and you're not evil, and you're not unforgivable, and you're not beyond redemption.

2. *A. GRACE: Because of Calvary Love, any part of your heart that makes you condemn and control and correct other people is not the spirit of Christ.*

- a) The spirit of Christ is the spirit of Grace.
- b) So now, it's just Jesus and this imperfect woman. Look at what he says to her:
 - (1) *When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, "Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?"*
 - (2) *She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more." (John 8:10, 11, NKJV).*
- c) The spirit of Christ is the spirit of Grace.
- d) When I say Calvary, I mean the hill where Jesus died on the Cross. When I say Calvary Love, I mean everything that Jesus did on that Cross. Because Jesus dying on the Cross is the ONLY REASON, God could speak this grace into

that woman's heart. It all goes back to the Cross. The heart of Scripture is Christ. The heart of Christ is grace. The heart of Grace is the Cross. It doesn't matter where the condemnation daggers are coming from. From yourself. From your parents, teachers, boss, or peers. Jesus Christ came to tell you once for all, there is therefore now NO CONDEMNATION for those who are in Christ Jesus. Those voices don't come from God. You don't have to listen to them for even one more day.

3. B. *FORGIVENESS: Because of Calvary Love, you are already forgiven all your imperfections and failures.*
 - a) They have been washed away from God's sight forever.
 - b) I don't know what guilt or shame you bring with you today. I don't know your secrets. I don't know the stuff you've done you wish you could undo.
 - c) But I know there is forgiveness with God, and that is the only reason I can keep walking with him day by day.
 - d) I heard an old preacher say that if you knew what was in my heart, and how nasty and dark I can be, you wouldn't waste your time listening to me.
 - (1) But that's okay. Because if I knew all the nastiness that was in your heart, I wouldn't waste my time preaching to you!
 - e) When Jesus died, he paid the penalty for all that stuff. He suffered. He died. He washes you white as snow.
 - (1) "Come now, and let us reason together," Says the LORD, "Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool. (Isaiah 1:18, NKJV).
 - f) Jesus wants to speak forgiveness to your inner perfectionist, inner critic, inner judge and jury. And he wants to tell you the pressure is off.
4. C. *AWESOMENESS: Because of Calvary Love, God sees the awesomeness, coolness, capability, and beauty of the person he's making you to be.*
 - a) Here is the world's weirdest Bible verse:
 - (1) You shall no longer be termed Forsaken, Nor shall your land any more be termed Desolate; But you shall be called Hephzibah, and your land Beulah; For the LORD delights in you, And your land shall be married. (Isaiah 62:4)
 - b) Let's decode this, especially the Hebrew words, Hephzibah and Beulah. Here's what it all means:
 - c) Just when you feel totally rejected, just when you feel totally unloved, God swoops in, and sweeps you off your feet and he says you're beautiful to him.
 - (1) He calls you Hephzibah, which means you make God happy whenever he looks at you.
 - (2) He calls you Beulah, which means you are beautiful to him, like a bride or groom dressed for your wedding day.
 - (3) He says you are Not Forsaken; you are connected to God. He delights in you.
 - d) How did he come to see you this way?
 - e) Christ washed you. Christ performed a spiritual makeover on you, and whatever ugliness marred your beauty has been swept away. He robed you in glorious robes of beauty. He decked you in absolute perfection.
 - f) When Christ was crucified, he absorbed whatever ugliness clung to you. He buried it forever in a sea of forgetfulness. So now you are perfect in God's eyes. No matter what you do or don't do or start doing or stop doing.
 - g) It's grace. Be secure.
 - h) Your sins won't stick to you. Your tears won't make you ugly to God. The marks on your body, the weakness in your bones, the failure of your systems, the brokenness mapped in your eyes, and the sadness of your smile... none of these change the fact of your awesomeness in the eyes of God. His heart melts over you. He rejoices over you with "leaps of joy" (Zephaniah 3:17).
5. D. *GROWTH: Because of Calvary Love, I can grow in Self-esteem and self-confidence even in the face of failure, rejection, and tough times.*
 - a) Self-esteem doesn't come from being praised all the time.
 - b) Self esteem doesn't come from trophies.
 - c) It comes from a) growing deeper and deeper in how God sees you, and b) living from that place, especially after you fail. Get up and try again. Get up, don't pout, don't whine, don't quit. Overcome adversity, don't run from it. You can do it. You can accomplish great things with your life.
 - (1) What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? (Romans 8:31, NKJV).
 - (2) So Blunder Forward!
 - d) And it starts by knowing Christ, resting in Calvary love, and then blundering forward because even if you fail, you just can't lose.