

# Chasing Perfect

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**HARVEST HOUSE PUBLISHERS**  
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### **Chasing Perfect**

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You therefore must be perfect,  
as your heavenly Father is perfect.

**MATTHEW 5:48**



For Jesus,  
my perfection



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# Spent

You make known to me the path of life.

PSALM 16:11 NIV

You don't have time for this.

The laundry is piling up, grocery shopping needs to get done, and your lovable family dog just rolled in goose poop. And now he's sitting on your cream-colored suede couch. Next to your son's unfinished homework. You're supposed to call the babysitter to confirm Friday night, but you haven't really talked to your husband since that fight last week.

Or maybe you are rushing out the door for the umpteenth time, fighting back both the traffic and the tears. You never imagined you'd be a single parent in your mid-thirties, and your daily life is a continuous treadmill, where the speed and incline keep increasing. You don't know if your emotional legs can keep up.

Or perhaps you woke up with a heavy heart this morning. You thought a quality education and a great job would catapult you into a life of happiness, but you feel heavy and defeated. Even though you attend a great church with a thriving singles group, you are going

through guys faster than you can swipe left and the dream of a family is fading. You'd stop and cry about it, but you don't have time to fix your makeup.

Something is seriously wrong, and it's not just the fact that you stayed in your pajama pants until noon.

It's the daily grind. It's the schedules we keep, the activities we commit to, and the plans we make. The plain old ordinary, mundane rhythm of activities keeps chipping away at our souls as we chase the perfect life.

As I was burning dinner the other night, I was listening to a show on the National Geographic channel. Two deep-sea diving experts were discussing the physics of a submarine. I found it fascinating that every square inch of a submarine's hull can withstand 580 pounds of pressure. The deeper the vessel submerges, the more pressure is exerted on the structure. As I sat there wondering how a submarine isn't completely destroyed by the extreme environment it must function in, it hit me:

*What's on the inside has to be stronger than what's on the outside.*

The same can be said about our lives. And our souls.

It's not the endless laundry to fold, bottoms to wipe, and toys to pick up. It's not the aging parents or wrinkling skin. It's not the sagging jeans or the muffin top. These are all external factors, and even if we learn how to prioritize better, find the best yes, or do the next right thing, we are still going to feel thousands of pounds of pressure every day. We have to strengthen what's on the inside if we want to deal with what's on the outside.

We feel spent because our souls are depleted. We are chasing after perfect in our relationships, jobs, and activities, but we are still discontent. Our souls are crying out for purpose and stability. Our world feels smaller than it should, and we feel a bit insignificant. The random pedicures and late-night drinks are not the panacea we were hoping for. At the end of the day, we've begun to realize that perhaps the perfect we've been searching for isn't in all the things.



Perhaps it's in a relationship.

You can eat all the kale,  
buy all the things,  
lift all the weights,  
take all the trips,  
trash all that doesn't spark joy,  
wash your face and hustle like mad,  
but if you don't rest your soul in Jesus,  
you'll never find peace and purpose.

## OUR LIVES AND SOULS

In Matthew 11:28-29, Jesus eloquently stated, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” This verse is often quoted by well-meaning pastors in their sermons and on podcasts for good reason. Because we feel completely exhausted, teachers want to remind us that in Christ, we can find rest. Not any old get-a-good-night-sleep rest, but the deep, peaceful soul rest we've been seeking.

Jesus does offer us rest. But that's not all Jesus said. In fact, I probably read this verse a hundred times before I began to understand the message within the message. And I'm certain I'm still just scratching the surface.

In these verses Jesus is offering an open invitation for all of us who are labored and burdened, worn out and weary, sleep-deprived and depressed, to come to Him. He does not show any favoritism. With open arms, He gladly embraces all of us. He is directing us—perhaps

even pleading with us—to come to Him for rest. Our Savior knows we will habitually go to shopping, social media, friends, or drinks instead of turning to Him. So He reminds us that true rest is found only in Him.

This isn't just good news; this is *the* news! The God of the universe is telling us that we should unload our worries on Him and He'll take care of them. We don't have to carry the burden of a cheating spouse, an empty womb, or an unfulfilling job with us. We can lay down our pain and pick up His peace.

But then He says something that blows my mind. He says, "After you put down *your* burdens, pick up *My* burdens and let's walk them out together. Then you will find peace for your souls." This is what He means by "take my yoke upon you and learn from me."

For us city folks, a yoke is a wooden crosspiece that fastens over the necks of two animals, typically oxen or horses, so that they can plow a field or pull a cart together. Farmers used to believe that if one ox could pull 500 pounds, then two oxen harnessed together could pull 1,000 pounds. But in reality, when two oxen are yoked, they can pull in excess of 1,250 pounds.

What Christ is sharing with us is transformational and counter-intuitive. He is saying that we are spent not because we are carrying things, but because we are carrying the *wrong* things. He is saying we are exhausted not because we are plowing the field, but because we are plowing the *wrong* fields. He is saying we are overwhelmed not because we are doing too much, but because we are doing too much on our own power.

Our souls are suffocating.

So we should probably stop and ask, what exactly is the soul and how do we keep it healthy?

The word *soul* is used many different ways. We've heard the soul must feel its worth. We are told it can be bought, sold, and lost. We've heard Jesus is the lover of our souls. In the Psalms, the soul sings, pants,

and thirsts. We have soul survivors and listen to soul music. We pray the Lord our souls to keep. When we look into someone's eyes, we often say you can see into their soul.

All these phrases make the soul feel very magical and mysterious. But if we are to fully understand the emptiness keeping us up at night, we have to make the soul more tangible and real, with a respect for its eternal significance.

When struggling to grasp a complex concept we're often told, "If you can't explain it to a six-year-old, you don't understand it yourself." Since most six-year-olds have the attention span of an over-caffeinated gnat, I'll try to keep it simple:

You are like an iPhone.

The physical phone is your body, but the software—the operating system that makes everything work together—is your soul. Your soul integrates all aspects of who you are and what makes you unique.

All the aspects of your life—your mind, will, emotions, conscience, and heart—rely on your soul. Your soul is the operating software, and all the various roles you play are simply applications that live on top of it. The role of mom is an app that relies on the stability of the soul. The role of a loving spouse is an app that feeds on the health of the soul. If you find yourself melting down, struggling to communicate, or feeling depressed, it is not because the circumstances are unbearable. It is because there is something wrong with your soul. And when the operating system crashes, all the applications go dark.

The health of your soul is crucial to living a godly and productive life. With that in mind, we should pause and ask ourselves some poignant questions:

We are spent not  
because we are  
carrying things,  
but because we  
are carrying the  
*wrong* things.

*How many roles can I truly handle?* In today's feminine-empowered world, we are told we can do and be anything. We can lead companies, families, and small European nations. We can glide into board meetings and family meetings sporting a cute pair of heels and balancing a briefcase and a diaper bag. While I'm certainly a proponent of using our God-given gifts, it's foolishness to act like Wonder Woman. We are beautifully and wonderfully made, but we have limits. When we red-line our calendars and our hearts, we come to a breaking point.

*How am I nourishing my soul?* If you fail to upgrade the software on your phone, all the apps will begin to slow, freeze, and eventually crash. The same can be said of your soul. Throughout the book we'll talk about how we can feed our souls on a daily basis, but just

If you find yourself melting down, struggling to communicate, or feeling depressed, it is not because the circumstances are unbearable. It is because there is something wrong with your soul.

know that “nourishing our souls” is different from “escaping.” We are quite skilled at finding activities—whether it be purchasing purses or sipping lattes—that help us escape. But an escape is putting a Band-Aid on a gunshot wound. We are only distracting ourselves, not feeding our souls.

*Am I listening to my soul?* This is so critical. All day long we are bombarded with people's needs: “What's for dinner?” “Can we have sex tonight?” “Your kid just puked in his kindergarten class.” And we have to respond to each one of them. It's exhausting. But are we listening to the deeper cries that stem from our souls? They aren't as loud or as obvious as the ones that

fill our minds and calendars. But they are the ones that will alert us to stress, anxiety, and depression. They are also the ones that will help us recharge and recover.

Of course, our iPhone won't work at all if it hasn't been charged. It has no power of its own. For the Christian, the power source is Jesus Christ. He is the sustainer and giver of life. Just like our phones must be charged regularly, our souls must charge daily. Hourly. Continuously. We are renewed and restored when we are plugged in to Jesus through prayer, time in the Word, and meaningful community with other believers.

Most of us are addicted to our iPhones. We rarely put them down and we monitor them constantly. If we are going somewhere, we check them for directions. If we want an update on the weather, we consult the touch screen. Whenever an aspect of our life needs guidance, we turn to the glowing box.

It's time we have this same maniacal, obsessed focus on the Life-giver of our souls.

## COUNTING THE MOMENTS

I once gifted my husband a container of small stones on his birthday. I'm thoughtful like that. Each stone represented a month we had remaining until our children left home. While some may consider this a countdown to freedom, we have different intentions. We use the stones as reminders that even though the days seem long, the years are short. We have to live each exhausting moment of parenthood with intentionality and purpose, joyfully celebrating the gift of time and the brevity of life.

I've been blessed with three wonderful kids. They are constantly testing my patience and the hardwood floors, but I can't imagine life without them. Reign is twelve, and the prototypical firstborn. He's an introvert

and a perfectionist who can typically be found with either a football or basketball in his hands. The only thing bigger than his desire to win is his heart for Jesus, and I almost tear up every time he says a prayer.

Sage is ten and has already claimed the title jack-of-all-trades. She likes volleyball, basketball, swimming, piano, art, theater, school, Bible study, and about a dozen other activities that all practice on Monday. She is always smiling and joyful. I'm a bit biased, but I think she attacks life like Tarzan and is as beautiful as Jane.

And then there is Rogue. He is eight and lives up to his name. He is the youngest, and he is incredibly smart and fun. Everyone at school, regardless of their grade, knows Rogue. To him, no one is a stranger and everyone is a target, either for a high five or a forearm shiver. He's got the Brad Pitt charm going on, but I don't fall for it. Too often, at least. When he asked to be baptized last summer at Pine Cove Christian camp and then clearly articulated his need for grace, I melted. He does that to me.

As I was watching the three of them play a game the other day that would most likely end up in an ER visit, God granted me one of those rare moments of clarity. I realized I only have a dozen more summers until all three of them leave the house. After that, there will be no more ice cream truck stops, pool floaties to blow up, or neighborhood Nerf gun wars to monitor. I only have about 20 family trips left. We always make such great memories snow skiing, zip-lining, and swimming, but we rarely get to take more than a couple excursions a year. I've always thought we'd have an endless number of SUV road trips, but I can now count them on my hands and feet.

When my kids were little, they always shouted, "Love you to heaven and back!" and "Love you more than you love me!" when they went to bed. But they aren't little anymore. I can't count how many times I'll hear these good-night phrases in years anymore; it may just be months.

We like pizza at our house and probably eat it once a week. Don't judge. I make salmon from time to time too. If I'm doing my math

correctly, we have around 416 more pizzas to eat together. This number may push out my waistline, but it pulls on my soul.

If we pray with them every day, we only have 4,380 more prayers left. Granted, our spiritual modeling and encouragement will continue into their adulthood, but not in the same way. We will continue to pray for our children, but not likely sitting bedside as we tenderly tuck them in snug as a bug in a rug. We constantly preach that relying on God is the most important thing, but the number of times we can exemplify this while they are under our roof is limited.

It may be hard to believe, but my kids argue. And fight. And occasionally say mean things to one another. Whether it is about Fortnite or who sits in the front seat of the car, they can be selfish little minions, which doesn't surprise me since we are related. But I only have a few hundred more opportunities to teach them about conflict resolution and model for them the grace of the gospel. These teachable moments will have to guide them in future conversations with their boss and spouse and their own children.

If I subtract the sleeping hours, I only have 61,320 more hours until Rogue leaves the house. I have even less with Reign and Sage. Somehow I have to squeeze in time to teach them how to make their bed, hit a jump shot, read their Bible, control their hormones, rejoice in suffering, navigate the Internet, live in thankfulness, drive the car, and give grace to others.

The rocks are slipping away fast. Sure, I will still be their mom, and God willing, I will still have opportunities to teach them as they grow, but those moments will be different. Embracing these opportunities now fills my soul. But I also wrestle with God and my feelings of anxiousness, nervousness, and inadequacy.

Fortunately, I'm not the first person to wrestle with God. Jacob wrestled with God all night. Maybe you understand a little of what he felt. Jacob, whose name meant "deceiver" or literally "grabber," had known a life of constant struggle and fear. He had served Laban, his father-in-law,

for 20 years. Worried that Laban would not let him depart, he secretly fled with all that he had. He was about to encounter his older brother, Esau, who was embittered over a stolen birthright. Because he feared for his life, Jacob hoped to keep his brother from harming him by sending gifts, women, and children along the River Jabbok.

So there Jacob was, surrounded by his enemies, stripped of his possessions, helpless, and out of control. He was out of tactics. He was out of strategies.

He was exactly where God wanted him.

Jacob was in a place of complete dependence, and God needed to do a work in Jacob's heart. He needed Jacob to see that nothing could be accomplished apart from Him. Jacob was missing the only thing that mattered.

After a long night of struggle, God did bless Jacob. He changed his name and identity from Jacob to Israel, which means "one who wrestles with God." But the blessing came with pain. God tweaked Jacob's hip permanently. No more CrossFit for Jacob. He needed a reminder that

his ultimate purpose and peace would not be found in his abilities, but in God.

**Don't miss the  
blessing buried  
in the busy.**

Although our daily struggles manifest themselves in different ways, they are like Jacob's limp. They are reminders of the good stuff. The endless pile of laundry

reminds us that we are blessed to have a family. The minefield of Legos reminds us that we have kids who love to play. The pile of bills reminds us that we have indoor bathrooms and a roof over our heads.

We spend ourselves in all sorts of various ways, but don't miss the blessing buried in the busy. Our limps remind us that we desperately need God and that He's always with us. God's deliverance is His presence. Remember to count the moments. It's the good stuff.



## RAGING PEACE

You probably don't know Gracia Burnham, but you should. In my opinion, she is one of the rare few who have discovered the secret to finding peace and purpose.

Gracia has three children, two boys and a girl. For 17 years, she and her husband, Martin, served with New Tribes Mission in the Philippines. Martin was a jungle pilot, and his job consisted of delivering mail, supplies, and encouraging messages and transporting the sick and injured to various medical facilities. Gracia supported him while homeschooling their children.

Everything changed on May 27, 2001, on their eighteenth wedding anniversary. During their celebration, the Burnhams were taken captive by a militant group of Muslims called the Abu Sayyaf Group. Along with other guests, they were taken to an ASG stronghold on Basilan Island.

Over the course of the next year they were constantly moved to new locations, living in primitive jungle conditions, evading Philippine military capture, withstanding gun battles, and experiencing unimaginable atrocities. Some of the hostages were killed and others were released, but the Burnhams remained in captivity.

After the events of September 11, 2001, the news media took great interest in the Burnham story and made it a national headline. The Philippine military felt the pressure and attempted a rescue mission. Tragically, Martin was killed by gunfire during the conflict. Gracia was wounded but rescued and returned home safely.<sup>1</sup> She now resides just minutes from where I live in Kansas. She has authored two books and spends her time testifying to God's goodness and the many lessons she had learned during her captivity. When asked about her life, she responds, "The Lord's mercies are new every morning. Great is His faithfulness."

Most women feel as though they give, give, give all day long. We give to ministries, the neighbors, our jobs, and the local PTA. We fill

the roles of taxi driver, chef, teacher, and lover. We run to the grocery store and through the carpool line when all we really want to run is a bubble bath. We feel called to give sacrificially of ourselves, but it is wearing us out. How do faithful women like Gracia stoke the internal fire to continuously serve? More importantly, how do they find peace amid such suffering and chaos? I think we often confuse peace with ease. Ease is comfort and convenience. Peace is a deep, settled soul unwavering by circumstance. Jesus never promised a life of ease, but He did say we would have supernatural peace when we trust Him.

For a long time I've wrestled over this idea, thinking that to really allow my soul to regain strength I'd need to get radical. I'd need to cut off the hand that causes the brokenness, to rid the sin that entangles me. Burn the kids' sport schedules! Toss the phone out the window! Quit all church activities! No more of anything. It's all or nothing. I struggle tremendously with navigating the middle ground, and my soul grows weary in the tension.

It's not reasonable to believe that all the activities are going to stop or that we can just bail on them. We can't. We are breadwinners and homemakers and lovers and nurturers and more. But we can reorient our lives so that we are focusing on the things that bring real peace and purpose. Instead of chasing after all the supposedly perfect things in the world, we can start by chasing after the real Perfect—our Savior, Jesus Christ. And then all our efforts can flow from there.

God knows a woman's heart. He knows we are anxious about everything. He knows we need a raging peace—a peace so overwhelming and powerful that it surpasses all understanding as it guards our hearts and minds.

## THE SECRET

Lots of stories in the Bible can resonate with our hearts as women. But the one that I think unpacks the mystery of chasing Perfect is Jesus' conversation with Mary and Martha.

In Luke 10:38, we find Jesus entering the village of Bethany. Martha, her sister, Mary, and her brother, Lazarus, lived there and welcomed Jesus and His followers into their home. In the passage, Mary was sitting at the feet of Jesus, listening to His teaching.

Martha, on the other hand, was fulfilling the job description of a typical woman of that time. She was in the kitchen serving. As Martha was running around handling all the preparations, she became angry with her idle sister. Finally, she had enough and marched right over to Jesus and told Him, “Make Mary help me.”

At that moment I can only imagine Jesus cracked a small and compassionate smile. He sensed her anger and distraction. He felt her worry and anxiety. He knew—just as He knows with each one of us right now—that she needed a mighty word of truth that would call her to a greater purpose and deeper peace. So He gently replied, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; but *only one thing* is necessary” (verses 41-42, emphasis added).

This book is about that one thing. And that one thing changes everything.