

Do You Find Perfection to be Stressful?

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Do you find perfection to be stressful? Jesus said, “Be ye perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

I bring that up for two reasons. (1) Fear of failure is a barrier to many people who might otherwise consider the gospel, because, to them, the gospel is not good news. (2) Fear of failure prevents many church-goers from enjoying life, seeing the gospel as something to be endured until death.

So what do people do to evade that stress? Some people just pretend that their shortcomings, real or imagined, don't matter. Ignore the problem and maybe it will just go away. It really doesn't matter that that tactic never works in any part of life; but it offers a brief respite from fear. Others believe that they should be the best that they can be and God will be satisfied. “Be all you can be” may be an outstanding slogan for the US Army, but the gospel has higher expectations. Just doing your best may have been good enough for your mom – I know that is what we always told our kids, “Just do your best.” But that doesn't seem to fit with, “Be ye perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.” Others just feel guilty all the time for not doing enough. That does not sound like good news to me. What those avoidance behaviors all have in common is that none of them will even entertain the notion of being “conformed to the image of His Son,” or “as He is, so are we in this world” (which are in Romans 8:29 and 1 John 4:17).

How do we relieve people of the stress brought about by their inaccurate perceptions of the gospel?

If we do not know how people think, we will be unable to communicate the gospel effectively. Communication is defined by what is received, not by what is sent. No matter what I say, if you hear something different, I have not communicated the gospel, rather I have merely reinforced your fears. How do I gain insight into how people think? Through an advanced studies in psychobabble? No, by listening. Ask people what they think. In general, people are happy to talk about themselves and their problems. Listen. Learn what they value and what they fear. Then match up the facets of the gospel that address their concerns. The trick is you have to know what is good about the good news. More than that, you need to be able to talk about it without Biblical phrasing, without loaded religious words. What do outsiders think righteousness is? Or glory? Or perfect? Or fulfilled? Do church folks do any better with their mental images of those words?

Here's an example from a few weeks ago. We were studying 1 John with a young man and his girlfriend. How we got there is a long story, but that's not my point. And, because I hope that he will listen to this lesson later, I want to be very clear that I am not ridiculing his understanding. Quite the opposite. I am giving you an example of my lack of understanding of his honest definitions of common words. When we read, “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him,” he disagreed. His concept of “the world” was the trees, the streams, the clouds, the mountains. The Bible was telling him that God was opposed to an appreciation of nature. He thought that was kind of weird. What popped into my head was that line by the warden in Cool Hand Luke, “What we have here is a failure to communicate.”

Literally billions of people throughout history have been driven away from the gospel by our failure to communicate.

Do you find perfection to be stressful? If so, my guess is that, somewhere in there is a failure to communicate.

The question of the hour – or at least the remaining 34 minutes – is do we communicate the gospel effectively? How do we take the stress out of perfection? Those are really the same question.

First, effective Bible study. I know of only two methods that work. One method I talked about last year. Write your question on a 3 x 5 card or a sticky note or something similar. Stick it edgewise in your Bible so you can see it while you read. Read the whole New Testament (eventually, the whole Bible) specifically looking for anything that even remotely relates to your question. Write down each one. When you finish reading, not before, organize the passages until they all point in the same direction. This avoids the method that, arguably, has caused the most damage to the gospel in the last 2000 years, the proof-text approach. Finding a passage that supports my belief – even looking at its context – does nothing about rooting out my fundamental assumptions, my unsupported assertions. If you look at all the passages, your assumptions will, at some point, become painfully obvious.

Example. Last Thanksgiving, Jeremiah arranged for me to speak at KNUST. The title was “Science and the Bible.” And, a decent number of students showed up. My major point was that a true scientist never stops seeking to disprove his own findings. People who make headlines in science generally only seek the evidence to support their hypothesis, the proof text method. And, just about every time, the headline fizzles, like cold fusion, because the science was defective – not that we are not still saddled with environmental legislation based on debunked science, like Freon affecting the ozone and oxygenates in gasoline improving air quality, but that’s another story. The same is true of the gospel.

Here’s an example. A young couple with whom we study regularly asked themselves the question, “Why do people I care about not want to hear the gospel?” And, by extension, what is my barrier to really getting into this? They determined, as a grand generalization, that their underlying fear was how God feels about me and my lack of perfection. So, we started in Matthew, one book per week. We all read the same book, then share what we found, or questions we had, among the four of us. In the interest of time, if you want to know how it’s going, what we’ve learned, ask us or the Fletchalls later.

However, even that method of Bible study is not without difficulty. Even reading the whole Bible in search of all the passages that address a certain questions, vocabulary can become a barrier to understanding. Case in point – “Be ye perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.” Using the common definition of “perfect,” that is one stress producing verse. Translators have tried to resolve the issue by using perfect (meaning, flawless), or complete, or mature in various places so that the stress level introduced by the common definition of “perfect” can be deflected by self-deception, which doesn’t work in any other part of life, but we keep trying it anyway.

Instead of beating our heads against verses like, “Be ye perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect,” we need to show a little confidence in God, that God intended for this to be simple and doable, so there has to be something wrong with my understanding of these seemingly simple words. As I have mentioned in previous Family Camps, the answer is to look up all the places where “perfect” is used in the New Testament, using your Strong’s concordance to be sure you get all of them, and that you separate the places where multiple Greek words ended up as the same English word, or the same Greek word ended up as multiple English words. If you want to review the method, I can e-mail it to you or put it on your memory stick. It’s easy. No knowledge of dead languages required. Just gather up all the passages and come up with one

definition that fits all the cases. Don't resort to the proof-text method, which is used by so many, where they take one passage and coax out of it a definition for a word, then force-feed that definition into all the other passages. No, get all of the passages going in the same direction, then draw conclusions.

In Fulton, we've done that with lots of words. Like perfect, which just means to be consistent. It works in every passage. Jesus used the concept of being consistent as His teaching style. "Who lights a lamp and puts it under a basket?" James wrote, "As a result of the works, faith was made consistent." John wrote, "By this, the love of God is made consistent in us." Jesus prayed that His future followers would be consistent in their unity. Be consistent, the way God is consistent.

Another good word study is "worship." Have you ever run into people who just cannot fathom that Christians do not gather on Sunday for the purpose of worship? Because people are so accustomed to the proof-text approach, they have been deprived of any confidence in the Word of God being perfect – consistent. But if you approach them by saying, "Let's gather all the passages that mention worship and see what they tell us." Those who care only about maintaining their illusions will not see the point in such a large undertaking. But there are less than 80 of them. We had one family who left, never to return, after the first four verses, taken in sequence from the New Testament. But, when we got to the end of the list, everyone else realized that what they had always been taught just wasn't in there.

Another is "glory." What is the glory of God? Most people visualize a halo, a divine glow, or perhaps an extreme dose of radioactivity. But it means character. The glory of God is the character of God. To glorify God is to say good things about the character of God. "Beholding as in a mirror the glory of God." What do you see when you look in the mirror? The character of God being developed in you, "Being transformed into the same image," from His character to your character.

Joy – rejoicing in the successes of faith, maybe mine, maybe yours.

Sacrifice – a celebration of forgiveness with family and friends in the presence of God.

Fellowship – a connection between spirits.

Here's a good one – "Blessed." For reasons that are a mystery to me, translators have chosen to render two completely different Greek words into the same English word. Don't worry; you don't need to know any Greek to figure that out. Just look at the numbers in your Strong's concordance. For one of the words, to be blessed is to have someone, hopefully God, say good things about you. But the other one, which in English is spelled exactly the same, is a completely different word with its own definition. It's a word that was used of really rich people who had so much wealth that they were completely above all the cares of life. They never worried about food or clothing or transportation or even political upheaval or war. They were that rich. That word came to be used in a figurative way of anyone considered extremely fortunate, so, in a manner of speaking, they were above the ordinary cares of this life. It was not a word commonly associated with religion. Jesus caught everyone's attention by putting that figure of speech in His first line to a large crowd, "Above the cares of this life are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Above the cares of this life are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Above the cares of this life are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."

We have several more such word studies that have helped us tremendously in communicating the gospel in order to reach people where they live, avoiding the whole "church-speak" vocabulary nightmare.

If you are willing to invest the time to arrange 30 to 50 verses and coax out of their contexts the concept that had been confusing you and millions of other people, I think you will have a really good time. And, it demonstrates that you have confidence that the Creator is capable of communicating clearly, if we will just set aside our assumptions and pre-conceptions. It's just good science: always trying to weed out our assumptions, always trying to prove myself wrong. Too bad the name Christian Science is already taken.

How do we take the stress out of perfection? How do we describe the gospel in such a way that people will remark, "Now that is really good news." First and foremost, we have to trust God. Most people think that the gospel leads you to trusting God. No, that's how you produce stress. It's the other way around. First you come to the conclusion that, whoever this God fellow is, He's bigger than I am and, logically, He's got to be a 100% good. Being part good and part bad is inconsistent and self-destructive. We need look no further than ourselves to prove that one. Being 100% evil is also self-destructive. So, 100% good is the only choice left. If God is 100% good, He's got to have my best interests at heart – and His knowledge of "best" has to be a whole lot better than mine. If we don't come to that conclusion before trying to understand the Bible, we can – and we have – come to a whole lot of really strange conclusions. If we start out thinking that God isn't going to like me, we are going to interpret everything that way. If we have been swapping ignorance with people we know, we have probably picked up lots of assumptions about how God manages things. Unfortunately, our baggage tilts us more than a half bubble off plumb.

Starting out with a level of trust in God's advice is a no-brainer. Now, just be consistent (perfect). And, that's where we encounter the first problem. What do we trust? To use a slightly more religious word, what do we do with this fledgling faith?

What happens as soon as I use that word? Assumptions leap out of the corners and cobwebs of your mind and tie up your thinking worse than the Lilliputians roped down Gulliver. So, we need a word study of faith. What is it? What's it made of? How's it work? Why is it good news? And, most importantly, how will it lower my stress level?

Having sorted through the roughly 75 paragraphs in the New Testament about faith, I have categorized God's version of faith into three essential parts, all three of which are necessary for faith to be the kind that God calls faith. And stress raises its ugly head. How much faith? Does having 2.6 parts round up to 3? How do I know if I have enough? You can imagine lots of really bad assumptions in response to that question. I promise; we will get to a stress-reducing conclusion, but first, here are those three parts of faith.

Of first importance, as Paul put it to the Christians in Corinth, is Evidence. Jesus staked His claims on physical evidence. Luke summarized it as "many unmistakable proofs." Paul ended his speech to the philosophers with, "having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead." The authorship of the Bible by miraculous people is well established. The accurate transmission of the Bible to our time is well established. Yet, people research the purchase of automobiles far more than foundations of their belief system.

Without evidence, my faith is based on me. Feelings move, facts don't. Without a solid foundation of facts, a belief system will collapse when needed most. Without an objective standard, hope is just wishing. Yet, churches have largely abandoned evidence, and challenges to the facts of faith are widely published, sort of like cold fusion. If God's version of faith is to exist, it must be built on rock, not sand.

I could go on for hours, I have gone on for hours, about evidence. But my objective this morning is taking the stress out of perfection, and even a study of evidence, while essential to

God's version of faith, can raise your stress level if you ask yourself, "How much evidence do I need for my faith to be acceptable?" Here's the short answer: the same level of evidence you would require for any life-or-death decision. Example: As a Christian in the United States, do any of you check your car for explosives before turning the key in your ignition? What would your answer be if you lived in the Middle East? If it's important, we check. Using the same illustration, do you understand everything between turning the key in the ignition and starting down the road? Not since the '60's. So, although we are quite willing to entrust our lives to a montage of parts, each provided by the lowest bidder, if it makes a strange noise, starts to smoke, or bounces uncontrollably, we usually stop to investigate. The wide road is littered with what most closely resembles the latter stages of the Demolition Derby, except that the drivers haven't figured out that their cars no longer move.

Here's a short outline for a study of evidence – conveniently alliterative. God created. That's pretty obvious. How God created is beyond my ability to deduce. God is going to have to tell me that one. But, I can be comfortable with "God created." Step 2: if God created, then God cares. Creation was not accidental; it was a purposeful act. Therefore, God has some level of concern for what He created. I may not know exactly how that concern plays out, but God is not just some impersonal power. God cares. Step three: God communicates. If God cares, He must communicate. Exactly how God chooses to do that, I don't know unless He tells me. But, logically, Creation implies Care, and Care implies Communication.

So how am I to find this communication? Whole library shelves are filled with books that make the claim to be that communication. My quick list of evaluation criteria all start with U. To qualify as a message from God, it must be understandable. Requiring human interpreters is inconsistent with the notion of God; God is capable of communicating clearly with His creation. If special education is required to understand this communication, the vast majority have no hope. Bottom line, if it sounds complicated, it's probably wrong. Second U: universal. The message has to be for everyone, equally, without regard for gender, race, ethnicity, creed or national origin. The third U is Unmistakable: objective proof. And the fourth U stands for Useful. Whatever this message is, it must tell me something I can use to make life better. It has to be good news.

Christianity is the only religion based on evidence. The Bible is the only document that passes the U-test: Understandable, Universal, Unmistakable, and Useful.

That's step one of faith: evidence. Step two: Redemption. Unfortunately, people are taught only about 30% of redemption, the forgiveness part. It's like some people use bankruptcy. All they see is a way out of crushing debt. They don't really think about the fact that they won't be able to get credit for quite a while. And, they probably don't think about all the people who were left holding the bag, who took a loss to pay off my irresponsible financial behavior. And even if they understand that Jesus paid our debt to justice, to the system of right and wrong, they still only know less than half of this essential step two of faith. The general understanding of God's forgiveness is a result of the proof-text method. You can find lots of verses that talk about forgiveness and Jesus taking our sins, but the multitude of passages about redemption are generally ignored.

Redemption refers to the purchase of a slave from one master to another master. We have been purchased from the law of sin and death (Romans 8) into slavery to the law of faith, or the law of the Spirit of life in Christ. We ran up insurmountable debt in the economic system known as right and wrong. But we could not declare spiritual bankruptcy and leave someone holding the bag. Jesus paid off our debt. Dropping back to the financial illustration, if I paid off

someone's insurmountable credit card debt, would I then turn that person loose with a zero-balance credit card? That would be just plain stupid. If you can't handle credit, find someone with a big enough bank account to pay you out of the system and switch to cash. But you are not free. You just switched creditors. You now owe the one who paid your debt. You are still a slave, just with a much better master. If you can't handle the right-and-wrong economy (which would include all of us), find someone willing to pay off your debt to justice and switch to the faith system. That's redemption.

But why would God do that? Most people try to understand the answer to that question by invoking God's love. But that's inconsistent. If the goal were good behavior, and Jesus buys us out of our failed behavior business, He is inviting a bunch of failures to populate heaven. How long would it take us to make heaven a whole lot like earth, only longer? No, the purpose of Creation is not good behavior. That's the law of sin and death from which we were redeemed. God went to the trouble of building the universe, and it has been a lot of trouble since day six. He built it in order to have an incubator for faith. Here's the short proof. Handouts available electronically. Is God more concerned about physical bodies or spirits? Obviously, spirits. Angels are spirits. They had free access to God, yet some of them chose to opt out of God's love. What did they lack? Why did they fail? Lack of faith. How are they going to learn faith? They live with God. They walk by up close and personal sight. The point of the creation of the physical universe is to teach spirits about faith, both human spirits and those spirits we call angels. We have the ability to choose, just like angels. We can choose to go it alone in a right and wrong system (how did that work for you?) or you can opt into the faith system. The problem is that, at some point, we all took the right-and-wrong track and ran up an insurmountable debt. God is willing to pay us out of that system so that we can rejoin the reason for existence, faith.

Ponder this. We have the ability to choose. We even have the ability to choose correctly at each decision point. The fact that we don't is our fault, not God's fault or the fault of the system. But what if we managed to go through an entire life making all the right choices? We would then be flawlessly behaved lost people. If we want to spend eternity with God and not join the large percentage of angels who opted out and lost the war, what we need is faith.

We are not forgiven for our bad behaviors so we can try again in the behavior system. Lots of people picture themselves as being continuously forgiven for their behavior. There are three problems with that. First, that would be equivalent to a suspension of justice. Second, only the last redemption before physical death would be meaningful. Third, God would be attempting to build godly behavior rather than godly faith, but faith is the point of the universe.

But there is this nagging question that raises our stress level. If success is not flawless behavior but rather faith, what quality or quantity of faith qualifies as success? I'm sure you have heard lots of explanations of how much or how little faith is required. Look at it this way; if the standard for entrance is anything less than flawless faith, then heaven will be no different than earth, just longer. And, what would prevent us from flunking out of heaven like so many spirits before us?

Be ye consistent as your heavenly Father is consistent. How do I get there? This is not lowering my stress level one bit. That's because most people are taught less than half of one of the three essentials of faith. And even if you get through the first two, the quality issue leads us to becoming oblivious, self-deceived, or guilt-ridden.

Essential component of faith number 3: accomplishing what is humanly impossible. And this is supposed to reduce my stress level?

Look at it this way. If my trust in God involves only things I know I can do, trusting God is not a part of the picture. I know I can do it. That's walking by sight, not by faith. So, trusting God must involve things I cannot do no matter how hard I try. Secondly, success must be abundantly accessible to all, not just to the super talented. Thirdly, what God provides must be obviously beyond my ability, or what God provides would be redundant or indistinguishable from human ability. Fourthly, these humanly impossible accomplishments are for a purpose: to convince unbelievers that God is behind it, and that they can be successful, too.

Therefore, God must provide this abundant access in an unmistakably god-given manner. Further, God must provide this abundant access during life on earth. If not, God would just be re-manufacturing a bunch of wrecks into race cars, which would make life on earth pointless for teaching faith to ourselves or to the angels.

So what are these humanly impossible tasks? We call them promises. The Bible is littered with them, hundreds of them. A profitable exercise is to read through the New Testament, writing down all the promises you find. Having done that more than once, allow me to summarize. Some of the promises are about Judgment Day. People on earth are not going to see that one while living on this earth, so those promises are not useful for convincing unbelievers that God has got something I need. The promises that result in accomplishing what is humanly impossible, an essential characteristic of God's version of faith, have to do with developing godly character (also known as glory), developing Jesus' brand of faith.

What do people you know think about that? How do they react to the suggestion that God expects them to walk as Jesus walked, to be conformed to His image. To most church-goers, Jesus' level is unattainable, and to suggest that we can get there is blasphemous. But actually, the fact that Jesus' level is unattainable makes promises to that effect exactly what we should be looking for – that which no one could confuse with human accomplishment, no matter how highly I think of myself.

As I'm sure you have noticed in reading the Bible, God is fond of illustrations. The part of us that is of primary concern to God is our eternal part. Our physical parts are, by design, cut off from direct contact with our eternal part so that faith can happen, so that faith can bridge the gap. To make this connection real to our earth-bound mentalities, God has provided thousands of physical illustrations of non-physical principles. For example, the exodus from Egypt illustrates our release from bondage to sin. The wilderness wandering represents life on earth. God laid out some of the strangest battle plans in the history of warfare as illustrations of our battle plans for acquiring godly character. And the list goes on. The problem is that a lot of people focus on the physical and never make the connection to the purpose of the illustration. That's what happened to the Pharisees – the illustration became the goal. For many church-goers today, the physical act of the Lord's Supper or of baptism becomes the goal instead of the illustration. Yes, the examples of faith in the Old Testament are physical: miraculously conceived children, success in battle, leadership. The point is spiritual. The New Testament does not promise the faithful that they will be able to leap tall buildings in a single bound. We are not promised physical strength like Samson or fabulous wealth like Solomon. We are promised that we can have the faith and character of Jesus. Some of the side benefits are a miraculous unity between believers, peace of mind, knowledge, wisdom and understanding of God, and an abundance for every good deed.

What is it that people want? That question gets obscured in our economically prosperous culture, so a lot of people get no further than, "He who dies with the most toys, wins." But transport yourself to Bangladesh, or Pakistan, or North Korea. If you were an ordinary person in

one of those places, no amount of hard work would break the cycle of poverty. Political freedom is just not going to happen. You can see the prosperous, thanks to our information age. If you lived in one of those places, could you be happy? If we strip away physical comfort with no hope of getting it back, what would you want? Peace of mind. Overcoming me. A real relationship. Love. If the gospel does not address those goals, it is not good news. The sacrifice of Jesus is not the goal, it is just how God planned to pay off our debt to justice and purchase us for Himself. If we stop there, faith does not happen. How many church-goers summarize their faith as “believing that Jesus lived, died for me, and was raised the third day.” That’s not godly faith. That is memorizing a sequence of historical events.

We are promised that “we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory (character) of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.” Or Romans 8:29, “For whom He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.” Or Hebrews 2:11 “For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren.” 2 Peter 1:4, “by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped (past tense) the corruption that is in the world through lust.”

Modern translations have done their best to remove this promise from the Scriptures by changing a few prepositions. In English, you know that the prepositions “of” and “in” are different. They are in Greek, too. The difference is obvious. Yet, modern translators have, in nine places, changes the phrase “the faith of Jesus” and made it “faith in Jesus.” Huge difference, right? Here is one example. Compare these two translations of Romans 3:36 “That He may be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus,” or “That He may be just and the justifier of the one who has the faith of Jesus.” If you don’t believe the promise that we are being transformed into His image, if you don’t believe that Jesus’ image is a humanly impossible but attainable goal, then you have to dispose of this verse. But, by changing it to “faith in Jesus” we open up a whole new can of worms about “how much faith.” By the way, seeing Jesus as fundamentally different than people while He was on earth is the very definition of the antichrist, those who assert that Jesus did not come in the flesh.

God did not lower the bar so we could get in. That idea is the essence of legalism because then we need to define exactly where that bar has been lowered to. When I was young, I dreamed of playing above the rim. But as reality sunk in, being the best I could be with a high jump bar seemed more realistic, and the height always started at a level where I could succeed. But high hurdles seemed a little easier and just as acceptable. Then low hurdles. Now, the curb is enough.

God is not opening the back door so we homeless people can get a meal and some shelter. If God were to let in people of low hurdle faith, we could trash heaven in under a week. God’s been there. He’s got a new heaven and new earth in mind, where righteousness dwells. We are already seated in the heavenly places. God does not seem to have beefed up security to handle the lawless side of little faith. Rather, He describes in the present tense, “the spirits of just men made perfect.”

Faith requires that what we attain is bigger than us, so that unbelievers will be certain that the ability is not mine. John 17:21, Jesus praying for those who would believe as a result of the words of the apostles, “that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be one in Us, (why) that the world may believe that You sent me.”

1 Peter 4:11, “If anyone serves, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies (why?), that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.” If I do something good, people thank me or think highly of me. That’s not what Peter is writing about. The point is to serve in a way that people know it wasn’t you. They don’t thank you or speak highly of you. Instead, they say good things about the character of God, because it’s just plain obvious that the ability was His.

Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, “Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works (why is that, Jesus? So I can leave the world a better place? How’s that working?) and glorify your Father in heaven.”

2 Corinthians 4:7 “But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us.”

If I do a good thing because I know how to do it and have the money to get it done, God didn’t do it. I did. It’s still a good thing. But any observer can see that I had the ability to do it. If I give the credit to God, I will confuse the observers about faith. In those passages about glorifying God because of good stuff, the observers glorify God, not the doers.

And remember, these promises are not about giving mammoth sums of money or travelling to dangerous places or writing great books (God’s already written one you can’t top) or preaching great sermons (God’s got you beat on that one, too). These promises are about character, about being transformed into His image. The promises address directly what people really want: peace, overcoming me, relationships, and love.

How are you able to handle the chaos of a broken world? I want to know.

Why is death not a big deal to you? I want to know.

I wish I had your family. How do you do it?

How do you get all these crazy opportunities? I want to know.

Or my friend Michael, a recovering addict with almost a year clean after more than 10 years not, who gets this question all the time “How do you do it? I need to know or I’m going to die.” Since you don’t know Michael, let me summarize. He is faith on two legs.

Or the comment from our son-in-law and my business partner, who baptized his soon-to-be 17 year-old son a month ago, about Nick Jacobs, “But he’s still standing.”

But that doesn’t do much for my feelings of inadequacy. I’m supposed to have faith and I’m not doing anything that God obviously accomplished through me. If only those with the faith of Jesus get in, I’m just not going to make it.

Think about 1 John 3:20, “Even if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things.”

As Paul put it in Philippians 3, “Not that I have already attained or am already perfected (made consistent on God’s level), but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have laid hold of it, but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press on toward the goal of the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

Take the stress out of perfection. Know the promises. Trust God at the most simplistic level; He’s a good guy. That’s the purpose for which Jesus Christ laid hold of me. Let Him transform your character into Jesus’ character.