

A PASTOR'S DAILY STRUGGLE AS BOTH SINNER AND SAINT TO STRIVE FOR
EXCELLENCE WHILE AVOIDING PERFECTIONISM

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ABSTRACT

In a world where pastors are expected to complete an infinite number of tasks and do all of them to the highest degree, these expectations can affect a pastor both mentally and physically. The pressures pastors experience are due in part not because of the many tasks, but rather the souls who are impacted by the tasks. The pastor feels additional stress and pressure because he knows the time of grace for these souls is running out. The expectations and pressures may lead a pastor to perfectionism. The primary goal of this thesis is to reveal what perfectionism is and how it impacts the pastor. It also encourages the pastor as both sinner and saint to wrestle with the daily struggle against perfectionism and to strive for excellence instead. Though this thesis is directed toward the pastor, the information that is spoken of in this thesis can be applied to all called workers. The thesis intends to encourage conversation about the impact of perfectionism on the ministry of pastors, teachers, and staff ministers in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS).

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INTRODUCTION

The pastor's hidden struggle is real. He faces it day in and day out. The struggle could go without notice by the congregation, and even by the pastor's family. The struggle is often pushed to the side or considered as nothing. The struggle should not be taken lightly. The struggle is dangerous. The struggle is damaging. The struggle is with perfectionism!

Perfectionism hovers waiting to wreak havoc on its next victim. When it claws at the pastor, he knows. He knows the battle against perfectionism is about to begin. The fight is not with swords or with guns, but with questions and self-doubt. Has he done enough? Has he done his best?

All the while, as the pastor fights back by working harder, spending more time on his work, he thinks he will come out ahead. The fight is not that simple or that easy. Instead, perfectionism digs its claws in deeper. It forces the pastor to dwell on his mistakes made in the hospital visit or worship service. For the pastor, the battle with perfectionism seems like it will never end. Instead of perfectionism being a distant acquaintance, it turns into an unwanted companion the pastor is unable to shake off or run away from.

This thesis seeks to answer the pastor's daily struggle as both sinner and saint to strive for excellence while avoiding perfectionism. The thesis will begin to provide answers to that struggle by defining what excellence is and establishing how it compares with perfectionism. It is vital to understand what excellence is—and what perfectionism is—to recognize where a pastor might be on that spectrum. Then this thesis will explore how perfectionism seduces the pastor into its clutches by manipulating his heart, mind, and body, and reveal the cold reality that perfection is never reachable. Following this, the thesis will state how perfection was achieved through Christ so that the pastor may attempt to strive for excellence. Finally, the thesis will explain how a pastor's life, as both sinner and saint, might look while striving for excellence.

OVERVIEW OF EXCELLENCE

Definition of Excellence

Defining excellence is a difficult task. There are several elements contributing to its various definitions. The struggle of pinpointing the definition of excellence and how it is used is no new struggle. The ancient writers Homer, Plato, and Socrates, would use ἀρετή, the Greek equivalent for excellence. The complexity and ambiguity of ἀρετή are seen in how this word is interpreted. Sometimes ἀρετή refers to “excellence of achievement, to mastery in a specific field, on the one side, or to endowment with high power on the other, or often both together.”¹ Another way to understand ἀρετή is “any excellence of a person (in body or mind) or of a thing, an eminent endowment, property or quality. Used of the human mind and in an ethical sense it denotes 1. a virtuous course of thought, feeling and action; virtue, moral goodness...”²

Excellence is not any easier to define today. Often excellence is referred to as something done to a higher standard. Alternatively, as the Webster dictionary puts it, “The quality of being excellent.”³ Though this definition fits what excellence is, it does not help in defining the meaning of striving for excellence.

Excellence is also defined as a virtue. Excellence is a virtue because it seeks to hit a target that is continuously moving due to the fact the individual’s ability is constantly changing.⁴ The Oxford Dictionary described excellence in this fashion, “[Excellence is] an outstanding feature or quality.”⁵ For the purpose of this thesis, excellence as a virtue is the essence of striving for excellence.

¹ Gerhard Kittel, G. W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 458.

² Joseph Henry Thayer, Carl Ludwig Wilibald Grimm, and Christian Gottlob Wilke, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Being Grimm's Wilke's Clavis Novi Testamenti*, (New York: American Book, 1889), 73.

³ Merriam-Webster, accessed November 27, 2016, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/excellence>.

⁴ Murali Chemuturi, “Pursuit Excellence in Organizations - Chemuturi,” accessed November 29, 2016, <http://www.chemuturi.com/Pursuit%20Excellence%20in%20Organizations.pdf>.

⁵ Oxford Dictionaries - Dictionary, Thesaurus, & Grammar, Oxford Dictionaries | English, accessed November 29, 2016, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/excellence>.

Excellence has Goals

The primary focus of striving for excellence is the virtue of reaching for an overarching goal—a goal outside of one’s self. In American society people focus on me, myself, and I, and trample all over the next person to get where they want to go. In this type of society, it is easy to fall into prestige and conceit, all the while ignoring the drive to strive for something outside of one’s self. Excellence, however, does not aspire to selfish desires or thoughts; does not care about glory and appearing excellent. Instead, “Excellence demands [or wants] a worthy object and a worthy goal,” an object or goal to strive for.⁶

The overarching goal of striving for excellence supersedes the person attempting to achieve it. For this reason, the person is eager to identify the overarching goal and to accomplish it. The major difficulty, however, is identifying what the overarching goal is. Attempting to specify the goal from a worldly perspective is impossible because a person must discover it on his own, which he is unable to do. Even though the overarching goal from a worldly perspective is unclear, the overarching goal from a Christian perspective is evident. The Christian’s overarching goal is revealed in the Bible: to love the Lord and to love others. Loving the Lord and sharing love with others is a goal superseding the person and a goal worth striving for excellence in. The overarching goal causes every other aspect of striving for excellence to fall into place.

However, at the same time, excellence understands there may be a variety of goals to strive for excellence in. There is one overarching goal, but there are many sub-goals. A person has several sub-goals in his lifetime, sub-goals which change over time.⁷ For example, a single person has different sub-goals than one who is married or one who has children. There are many other factors that impact establishing the sub-goals: for instance, occupation, culture, and religion.

A person who strives for excellence does not ignore sub-goals such as sleep, relaxation, hobbies, and exercise in striving for the overarching goal. All these sub-goals have an important

⁶ Michael Scott. Horton, *Ordinary: Sustainable Faith in a Radical, Restless World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 29.

⁷ Ted W. Engstrom, *The Pursuit of Excellence* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 1982), 28.

role in striving for excellence in the overarching goal. They contribute to the overarching goal in different ways. For example, one who strives for excellence in sleep will be rejuvenated and focused to achieve the overarching goal. The one who strives for excellence in his hobbies has different results than sleep. The sub-goals may seem self-focused and contrary to excellence, but sub-goals, when properly pursued in striving for excellence, are not self-centered though the individual may benefit from success in these sub-goals.⁸ Therefore, the individual does not neglect the sub-goals while achieving the overarching goal.

Excellence in Time

Excellence attempts to achieve the overarching goal and sub-goals with the proper use of time, effort, and skill. Excellence desires to give all it has to the overarching goal and sub-goals because it cares “enough to invest time, effort, and skill into [the goals].”⁹ Therefore in striving for excellence, the individual values time, shows patience with time, and forgives the time used incorrectly.

Time is a valuable part of one’s life because each person has a specific amount of time before he dies. Another reason time is valuable is because one only has so much time in a day. The value of time in a day and one’s life is seen in how people look down upon wasted time, especially in corporate America. This perspective of wasted time is supported by books focusing on utilizing time such as *Getting Things Done*, or programs helping people focus such as *Focus Buster* and *SelfControl*. Excellence, too, does not like wasted time, but rather purposeful time. The individual sets aside time to achieve the overarching goal he is striving for. All the while, excellence cherishes the moment of time it is in and is willing to adapt its schedule to the situation.

⁸ “Psychiatrist Ari Kiev of Cornell University, in his fine little book *Strategy for Daily Living*, writes about the importance of setting a goal for a person’s mental health. ‘In my practice as a psychiatrist, I have found that helping people to develop personal goals has proved to be the most effective way to help them to cope with problems. Observing the lives of people who have mastered adversity, I have noticed that they have established goals and sought with all their effort to achieve them. From the moment they decided to concentrate all their energies on a specific objective, they began to surmount the most difficult odds....The establishment of a goal is the key to successful living’” (Engstrom, 26).

⁹ Horton, 29.

In striving for excellence, the individual shows patience because it takes time to achieve excellence. American society struggles being patient with time. Michael Horton stated, “Patience is precisely what excellence requires, but it’s a difficult commodity wherever the cult of immediate results dominates. Faithfulness over the long haul is undermined by perpetual innovation.”¹⁰ One example of how achieving immediate results dominates our culture is the popularity of the smartphone. People do not need patience when using their phones. They can communicate with others right away via text, call, or email; and can download programs in the blink of an eye. Technology’s instant gratification raises expectations that one can develop abilities more quickly. Instead of being patient, people want to have knowledge, strength, and skill immediately.

Improving one’s self in knowledge, strength, and skill does not happen overnight. In striving for excellence, the individual shows patience with the process and patience in achieving the goals. He shows patience because the goals may take considerable amounts of time.¹¹ Despite the many hours invested, excellence still dedicates the time needed every day to complete or develop the goals.¹² The individual will have to be patient since goals might take a lifetime to complete, or may never be completed.

The person who strives for excellence forgives time used incorrectly. There are occasions when a person wastes time or uses too much time. It is difficult to use time appropriately for each task. However, those who strive for excellence forgive their failure to dedicate appropriate time to a particular task.

Therefore, the individual learns from his mistakes and understands he cannot dedicate every minute of every day to the sub-goals. The person is willing to say, “Enough is enough”

¹⁰ Horton, 30

¹¹ Ted Engstrom mentioned that the difference between amateur and professional is five minutes more (Engstrom, 33). Malcolm Gladwell suggested in his book *Outliers* in order to master a skill or topic one has to put in 10,000 hours. Gladwell was emphasizing practice or interaction had a major role in success (Malcolm Gladwell, *Outliers: The Story of Success* (New York: Little, Brown and, 2008), 35-68). However, a study done by Princeton proved Malcolm Gladwell’s theory incorrect. In their study they discovered practice had a smaller impact than what Gladwell suggested (<http://www.scottbarrykaufman.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Macnamara-et-al.-2014.pdf>). Despite the Princeton study, Engstrom and Gladwell are still valid in that time invested in a goal leads to success or improvement.

¹² Engstrom, 26-27.

with the time given, and show contentment with the time used. There are some days where an individual is able to provide more time to a particular sub-goal than others. As a result, one must utilize the time given and must have enough control to move on when appropriate. This perspective moves the individual striving for excellence to realize more time can be given another day.

Excellence in Effort

The one who strives for excellence is willing to put in the effort it takes to achieve excellence. While investing the effort necessary for his goals, he is willing to take action, embrace pain and struggle, and be content with the past, present, and future. Any person can make goals both big and small, but goals not acted upon do no good. Goals not acted upon cease to be goals and instead become “daydreams.” This is where the clear overarching goal and sub-goals come into play. A clearly defined goal is easier to act upon than one that is ambiguous.¹³

A person who puts forth effort while striving for excellence often encounters pain and struggle. Though effort comes with pain and struggle, excellence is willing to embrace it for the purpose of achieving its goals. Pain and struggle are often viewed as unacceptable. People try to avoid it by running away or taking a drug. Sometimes, pain and struggle are acceptable. There is some truth to the phrase, “No pain, no gain.” An athlete who tries to further his skill experiences some pain and struggle in the process. For example, a person who wants to improve his running skill fights through every mile as mental and physical fatigue sets in. He must embrace pain and struggle to come closer to accomplishing his goals. The individual who strives for excellence understands pain and struggle are a part of the road to excellence. The person will not simply back down because pain and struggle is involved. He considers it as part of achieving the overarching goal. A person who strives for excellence understands effort embraces pain and struggle. He also understands while striving for excellence he is content with effort in the past, present, and future.

¹³ Engstrom, 26.

Effort in the Past

In striving for excellence, a person seeks to be content with past efforts and the results of the efforts. Past efforts are easily evaluated. Once these past efforts are assessed, the person realizes efforts fluctuate over time for a variety of reasons. Excellence does not dwell on past effort, especially where it was lacking. The individual simply wants to discover the cause of the lack of effort. Then he evaluates fairly what has been discovered, and uses the information for present and future efforts.

Since a person who strives for excellence is content with past effort, he will not hesitate to make mistakes. A person who is not putting forth effort is avoiding mistakes. Mistakes are fine and good. One learns from mistakes. Steve Jobs, the former Apple CEO, once said, “Sometimes when you innovate, you make mistakes. It is best to admit them quickly, and get on with improving your other innovations.”¹⁴ Excellence does not dwell on mistakes more than or less than accomplishments. It simply acknowledges mistakes and learns from them, making changes where appropriate.

Effort in the Present

The perspective one has on past efforts impacts present efforts. If the results of past efforts are not trusted, then the efforts of the present are not allowed to function naturally. Timothy Gallwey broke down this internal struggle into two different categories of the human psyche, “Self 1” and “Self 2.” Self 1 is known as the “teller,” and Self 2 as the “doer.” Self 1 tells Self 2 what to do. The example Gallwey offered was of a tennis player trying to correct her swing. The more she thought about her swing, the more she messed up. Gallwey suggested this mindset of overthinking comes from Self 1. What Self 1 is ultimately doing is not trusting Self 2. Self 1 is attempting to take control versus allowing and trusting Self 2 to operate freely.¹⁵ The

¹⁴ Jeff Haden, “7 Inspiring Steve Jobs Quotes That Just Might Change Your Life,” Inc.com, 2015, accessed November 29, 2016, <http://www.inc.com/jeff-haden/7-inspirational-steve-jobs-quotes-that-will-change-your-life.html>.

¹⁵ Timothy W. Gallwey, *The Inner Game of Tennis* (New York: Random House, 1974), 10-13.

duel mindset Gallwey suggested does not derive from Christian thinking, but rather a humanistic philosophy.

Other psychologists suggest mindfulness is needed to achieve present efforts excellently. When mindfulness is mentioned, it could mean “to be aware of one’s surroundings” or “to think before one speaks.” In psychology, however, mindfulness includes being aware of surroundings and internal processing, but it is much more complex. Mindfulness is “the practice of maintaining a nonjudgmental state of heightened or complete awareness of one's thoughts, emotions, or experiences on a moment-to-moment basis; also: such a state of awareness.”¹⁶ In other words, mindfulness focuses on the moment and not to evaluate what is occurring, not allowing distractions and frustrations to creep in.¹⁷ Therefore, the person who strives for excellence is devoted to being mindful in the present.

Since striving for excellence does not allow thoughts, emotions, or experiences to manipulate an individual, this leads a person to be in a state psychologists call “flow.” Flow is a mental state where a person operates with focus and without hindrance. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, professor and former chairman of the Department of Psychology at the University of Chicago, stated,

Flow helps to integrate the self because in the state of deep concentration consciousness is unusually well ordered. Thoughts, intentions, feelings, and all the senses are focused on the same goal. Experience is in harmony. And when the flow episode is over, the one feels more “together” than before, not only internally but also with respect to other people and to the world in general.¹⁸

Flow is something to strive for in the pursuit of excellence according to Csikszentmihalyi and other psychologists. No matter if it is flow, mindfulness, or Self 1 and Self 2, psychologists are emphasizing the same point. These psychologists are stressing the importance of being at ease with one’s effort in the present.

¹⁶ Merriam-Webster, accessed November 27, 2016, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mindfulness>.

¹⁷ Brené Brown, *The Gifts of Imperfection: Let Go of Who You Think You're Supposed to Be and Embrace Who You Are* (Center City, MN: Hazelden, 2010), 60.

¹⁸ Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (New York: Harper & Row, 1990), 41.

Effort in the Future

The individual's efforts certainly take place in the past and present, but his efforts also take place in the future. The individual seeks to strive into the future no matter what the situation, no matter the scenario. Samuel Becket once recommended a similar perspective concerning the past and present efforts influencing future endeavors, "Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better."¹⁹ Excellence will try it again even if it means failing. The reason excellence keeps trying is because it understands it will get better at the task over time. Therefore, excellence is not afraid of the future or the uncertainty it may cause. Excellence simply knows it will put in the effort when the future comes, but until then, excellence's efforts focus on the present moment, all the while not dwelling on the past.

Excellence in Skill

Effort and time certainly play a factor in striving for excellence, but skill is the final piece of the puzzle. Skill, sometimes called a gift or talent, is an individual's natural or learned ability. A person uses his skill to complete a task successfully.²⁰ Skills can take on a variety of forms. It is important to recognize these specific skills when striving for excellence; it is also important to focus on improving these skills.

The person who strives for excellence understands there are many different categories of skills. Yes, skill can be the obvious or visual traits a person has like playing the piano, public speaking, or welding. However, there are also many other skills than the visually obvious ones. Donald Clifton, the father of strengths psychology and inventor of the Clifton Strengths Finder, proposed there are 34 skill sets such as achiever, activator, analytical, and many others. Each of these 34 skills encompasses a different quality or aspect. For example, a person who has the "developer" skill can see the potential in others and help them recognize and achieve the success he is capable of.²¹ Whereas, a person who has the "input" skill is more capable of gathering

¹⁹ "Samuel Beckett: Ten Best Quotes," The Telegraph, accessed November 29, 2016, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/theatre-features/9780670/Samuel-Beckett-ten-best-quotes.html>.

²⁰ Merriam-Webster, accessed November 29, 2016, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/skill>.

²¹ Tom Rath, *Strengths Finder 2.0* (Gallup Press, 2007), 89.

information from a variety of resources for future use.²² There are certainly more skills than the 34 Clifton suggests.

Understanding that skills take different forms is important. Yet, one needs to know what his specific skills are or are not. First, identifying the skills a person has emphasizes the importance of variety. Variety in life is good especially in the process of striving for excellence. If all people were the same in the world, it would be blasé and not as productive. Therefore, the variety of skills of individuals is important. A person's skills are necessary because they contribute to the overarching goal in their own special way, even if his skills are drastically different from another person's.²³

Second, knowing one's skills or lack thereof can help in dedicating that skill to the overarching goal. Once a person knows his skill set, he is more capable of utilizing his skill effectively for the overarching goal. Knowing one's skill helps in establishing a plan of action for achieving his goals in the most efficient manner.

Finally, the act of distinguishing one's skills can aid in improving them. There are some skills which come naturally and others that must be learned. For example, one person may have a natural skill of playing the piano, where someone else does not. Another may have the skill of cooking, and another does not. Studies from positive psychology suggest a skill that comes naturally is more easily improved than a non-natural one. The studies also recommend spending more time improving the natural skills versus the non-natural ones. Not focusing on the natural skills could lead to vast amounts of invested and wasted time; however, this does not mean a weaker skill should be entirely abandoned or neglected in striving for excellence.²⁴ Improving the non-natural skills might contribute to improving the natural skills or to achieving the overarching goal.

²² Rath, 125.

²³ Kevin DeYoung, *Crazy Busy: A (mercifully) Short Book about a (really) Big Problem* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 49.

²⁴ Rath, 7-9.

OVERVIEW OF PERFECTIONISM

Definition of Perfectionism

As one walks down the middle of the road while striving for excellence, on either side of the road are two ditches. The ditch on the right side of the road appears a more attractive alternative to the main road—a more controlled path. The ditch on the left side of the road appears as an effortless way out from the main road—an exit ramp of sorts. Even though these two ditches appear appealing and easy, they instead bring hardship and trouble. The more well-known ditch to the left is laziness, and the less recognized ditch to the right is perfectionism.

The edge of the road of striving for excellence is often blurred with the edge of perfectionism's ditch. At a distance away, the road and the ditch seem to flow together, appearing as if the ditch is an extra lane to the road. Instead, perfectionism is a separate entity from the road, and is vastly different and more dangerous.

Perfectionism left unchecked can lead to a mental disorder that attempts to achieve perfection or an unrealistic standard constantly. The Merriam-Webster Medical Dictionary specifically defines perfectionism as, “The setting of unrealistically demanding goals accompanied by a disposition to regard failure to achieve them as unacceptable and a sign of personal worthlessness.”²⁵ What perfectionism does to the mind is damaging and dangerous. It can hamper success, and cause anxiety, self-doubt, and other problems, possibly leading to suicide.²⁶ Perfectionism has this progression: “Set unreachable goals → fail to reach them → become depressed and lethargic → have less energy and a deep sense of failure → get lower self-esteem and high self-blame.”²⁷

²⁵ Merriam-Webster, accessed November 29, 2016, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/perfectionism>.

²⁶ There is some debate whether or not perfectionism should be classified as more than it is right now under the DSM-5. At the moment it is classified under the Obsessive-Compulsive disorder. However, Dr. Gordon L. Fleet, and Dr. Paul L. Hewitt, state that Perfectionism should be categorized also under panic disorder, social phobia, and eating disorders. Also, they suggest that there are different kinds of Perfectionism maladaptive and adaptive. Maladaptive is not being able to adjust to the situation, where adaptive is the ability to adjust (<http://ajp.psychiatryonline.org/doi/pdf/10.1176/appi.ajp.161.8.1511>). Even though Fleet and Hewitt make these difference, there are some that do not agree with their separation of: maladaptive and adaptive perfectionism. They believe it does more damage than good to make this distinction (<http://www.apa.org/monitor/nov03/manyfaces.aspx>).

²⁷ Adrian Furnham, Ph.D, "The Curse of Perfectionism," *Psychology Today*, February 12, 2014, accessed November 29, 2016, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/sideways-view/201402/the-curse-perfectionism>.

Perfectionism's Manipulation

Perfectionism can wreak havoc on an individual because it manipulates the core elements of excellence. It does this by manipulating goals, standards, emotions, skills, efforts, and health.

Manipulation of Goals

Perfectionism has goals like excellence; however, perfectionism manipulates the goals—along with the individual. Perfectionism manipulates the goals to an unachievable high standard. These unachievable high standards are perceived as being required, but are in fact not. Even though the goals are not required, the perfectionist, who is trapped by perfectionism's tendencies, forces these high standards on his goals. Dr. David Burns described perfectionism this way:

I do not mean the healthy pursuit of excellence by men and women who take genuine pleasure in striving to meet high standards. Without concern for quality, life would seem shallow; true accomplishment would be rare. The perfectionists I am talking about are those whose standards are high beyond reach or reason, people who strain compulsively and unremittingly toward impossible goals and who measure their self-worth entirely in terms of productivity and accomplishment.²⁸

The individual forces these standards without hesitation, and he simply considers these standards as a natural part life.²⁹

The goals a perfectionistic person chases after are not the same goals as those of an individual who strives for excellence. Excellence has an overarching goal and sub-goals to strive for outside of one's self, as perfectionism is obsessed with the sub-goals. However, a person who is under perfectionism may think he is chasing after a worthy overarching goal and sub-goals when in fact he is not. For there is only one true overarching goal and that is to love the Lord and show this same love to others. Therefore anything else as the overarching goal, especially under perfectionism, wants nothing to do with the true overarching goal because ultimately the self does not "benefit" from it. The individual, therefore, selfishly chases after the sub-goals for the possibility of receiving rewards and self-recognition the true overarching goal does not allow.

²⁸ David D. Burns, "The Perfectionist's Script for Self-Defeat," *Psychology Today*, November 1980, 34.

²⁹ Furnham.

Perfectionism can manipulate a person's desire to chase after the sub-goals. If the sub-goal is considered "worthy," perfectionism turns a worthy sub-goal into an unworthy one based on how the individual associates himself with the sub-goal. Perfectionism tries to convince the perfectionist that his desires can be achieved by changing how he thinks and acts. For example, perfectionism takes a sub-goal such as advancing in the corporate world, graduating from college, or some other accomplishment and focuses all the attention on the individual. Perfectionism does this by convincing the individual the purpose behind achieving the sub-goal was to receive a reward, recognition, or approval. However, simply changing one's thoughts and actions does not fix the problem because perfectionism stems from something more. Horton suggested perfectionism and its desires stem from a problem of not wanting to be "ordinary." He explained "ordinary" requires "reject[ing] the idolatry of pursuing excellence for selfish reasons."³⁰ Perfectionism does not desire ordinary results, but promises extraordinary achievements. This is why perfectionism is so appealing to a person's selfish rationale, whether they realize it or not.

Manipulation of Standards

The selfish attitude of perfectionism leads the individual to manipulate his own standards and impose them on others. The individual manipulates the standards by glorifying another person's accomplishment(s) and comparing them to his own. This process is known as the *Perfectionistic Trap*. This trap does not reflect the many failures the individual experienced before the finished product or goal. A person stuck in the perfectionistic trap obsesses over the other individual's final products, or how his creation falls short.³¹

Another way perfectionism manipulates is by imposing the same standards on those who cannot live up to them. The perfectionistic person holds others to his same standard, and if the individual does not match up to the imposed standard, he is judged harshly. Dr. Adrian Furnham stated similarly, "It can also mean imposing one's standards on others and having equally high

³⁰ Horton, 38.

³¹ "The Perfectionist Trap," YouTube video, Posted by "The School of Life," September 12, 2016, accessed November 29, 2016, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BY6bGhcNDDs>.

(often quite unrealistic) expectations of them.”³² Imposing a standard on others is ultimately an attempt to make the perfectionistic person feel better about his self-image by demeaning other individuals.

Manipulation of Emotions

The manipulation of standards derives from the manipulation of the person’s emotions, especially the emotions of shame and pride. The dominant emotion drawing a person toward perfectionism is shame—specifically the desire to avoid it. Dr. Brené Brown, a writer and research professor at the University of Houston Graduate College of Social Work, explained the connection between shame and perfectionism. “Where perfectionism exists, shame is always lurking. In fact, shame is the birthplace of perfectionism.”³³ Shame is the birthplace of perfectionism because the person cares too much about how others may perceive them. Shame is a debilitating emotion because it carries more weight from the pains of perfectionism, as the expectations are living, looking, and acting perfectly.³⁴ Therefore, if perfectionism can persuade the individual to avoid shame by eliminating mistakes, perfectionism then becomes an appealing solution to any potential problem.

A perfectionistic person also is tempted to run from shame to pride because pride seems like a positive alternative. However, pride is just as dangerous as shame, at the heart of pride is how a person thinks he is perceived. Pride can take a variety of forms as Kevin DeYoung suggested in his book *Crazy Busy*. For example, pride can take the form of “people-pleasing”—the act of a person saying yes to every request to avoid disapproval or disappointment. Another way pride manifests itself is “prestige”—the idea that a person believes his status is not ordinary, but extraordinary and anything less is a failure.³⁵ Like shame, pride leads the perfectionist to care too much about what others think.

³² Furnham.

³³ Brown, 55.

³⁴ Brown, 56.

³⁵ DeYoung, 35-38.

Manipulation of Skills

Perfectionism uses shame and pride to manipulate a person's perspective of his actual skill level and potential skill.³⁶ The influence of shame and pride on an individual may lead to extremes in one's estimation of skill level. First, it can give rise to an overestimation of one's skill level. Since perfectionism sets high standards for goals, the individual believes he can accomplish the goals simply with his skill, when in fact, he is not able.³⁷ However, the perfectionist has an unrealistic understanding of his skills. He perceives his skills as more advanced than they are.³⁸ Therefore, when the individual does not complete a task to the highest standard, the perfectionist is disappointed and feels ashamed for not accomplishing the task to his presupposed skill level.

Second, the manipulation of pride and shame can lead the perfectionist to underestimate or strive for a lower standard. The perfectionist is prone to striving for an unachievable higher standard, but he is also prone to strive for lower standards beneath the individual's potential. The perfectionist does this by purposely striving to complete a goal well below his skill level. He is motivated to do this because he knows if the standard is too high, there is no possible way to achieve the goal.³⁹ The individual who underachieves is working off a skewed perspective of his skill level. He is attempting to avoid the shame resulting from a standard that is too high, and instead experiences false pride

The emotions shame and pride impact the way a perfectionist views his potential skills. Skills adapt and change constantly.⁴⁰ This process happens naturally, but perfectionism tries to manipulate the process. It attempts to make skills develop more quickly and at a far higher quality than is possible for that particular individual. Perfectionism initially may seem like the

³⁶ Peg O'Connor, Ph.D., "Perfectionism Is Self-Deception," *Psychology Today*, February 11, 2015, accessed November 29, 2016, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/philosophy-stirred-not-shaken/201502/perfectionism-is-self-deception>.

³⁷ O'Connor.

³⁸ Tamar E. Chansky, "Free Yourself From Anxiety," Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2012, 38-39. Chansky explained how a neutral mindset is more beneficial than an over positive or negative mindset.

³⁹ O'Connor.

⁴⁰ O'Connor.

best option for self-improvement; however, it should never be viewed as self-improvement. It has a tendency to be restrictive to the point where the person cannot improve or operate because he fears shame and lusts for pride.⁴¹ Perfectionism's shame and pride tend to be so restrictive it does the complete opposite of facilitating the process. Many would argue that shame and pride can restrict the process because the individual could not "let go of the old process of correcting faults; that is, it is necessary to let go of judgment and see what happens."⁴² However, it is not always possible to turn on or off one's thinking at will.

Manipulation of Efforts

In order to meet perfectionism's standards, perfectionism manipulates efforts to be obsessive or lazy. An individual who strives for excellence is conscious of balancing his efforts between lethargy and obsession. Perfectionism does not care about any of that. Perfectionism throws out the window every reasonable check and balance excellence uses. Without reasonable checks and balances, the perfectionist becomes obsessive in his efforts by investing excessive amounts of time, energy, and thought. Instead of investing enough time to do the job well or what is required, perfectionism encourages obscene amounts of time—longer than a person should give. This obsessive mentality is applied to multiple tasks, and gives the false impression of responsibility. When tasks are not completed, the individual feels guilty for not doing more.⁴³

The other manipulation of effort leads to laziness, the desire for something far easier and less challenging. A person who is lazy is clearly not chasing excellence, but rather mediocrity or avoiding failure. Horton described lazy effort this way, "While we cannot care about everything equally at the same time, mediocrity results from not caring at all."⁴⁴ Laziness which leads to mediocrity is the opposite ditch of the road to excellence; yet, it is not completely detached from perfectionism. It is very much connected. Laziness appears to be the easy off-ramp of life.

⁴¹ Brown, 56.

⁴² Gallwey, 27.

⁴³ DeYoung, 44.

⁴⁴ Horton, 32.

However, there comes a point the individual must return to the main road. He is simply delaying the inevitable by giving into laziness. These “shortcuts” are seductive to the perfectionist because they seem like an easier route, but are not always beneficial.⁴⁵ The problem with bypassing or performing mediocly is primarily the lack of growth over an extended period. The person is simply unwilling to endure pain and suffering because he cares too much about self.

Manipulation of Health

All these manipulations come at a cost of the perfectionist’s health. Perfectionism first attacks the mental health of the person, and then it carries over to his physical health. A person is not drawn to perfectionism because he thinks this will result in more trouble. Instead, he believes perfectionism will give him pleasure and relief in his achievements. Philosophers call this the “hedonist paradox”: the irony that the pursuit of pleasure actually chases it away.”⁴⁶ The quest for pleasure can become obsessive and frantic under perfectionism, but franticness does not help the individual. The frantic mind thinks it can operate productively toward pleasure, but instead brings about anxiety, resentment, impatience, and irritability.⁴⁷ DeYoung quoted a study observing the side-effects of the frantic mind. “One study found that commuters experience greater levels of stress than fighter pilots and riot police. That’s what we’re facing when our lives are frantic and frenzied; we are more prone to anxiety, resentment, impatience, and irritability.”⁴⁸

Since the franticness of perfectionism causes these negative thoughts, the mind attempts to think positively. Compensating negative thoughts with positive thoughts does not work. Dr. Tamar E. Chansky, a licensed psychologist and one of the nation’s leading experts on anxiety disorders, stated, “The bad news is that just trying to be positive when you don’t really feel that

⁴⁵ Brown, 36.

⁴⁶ Horton, 57.

⁴⁷ It is important to make a distinction between worry and anxiety. “When worries become more than occasional in response to a stressful situation, and if they confront you at every turn, that’s the first red flag of an anxiety disorder. When you avoid important activities or situations because of fears of what could go wrong or simply because you know anxiety will make those situations impossible to manage or take all enjoyment or pleasure from the event, that’s the second red flag of an anxiety disorder” (Chansky, 134-145).

⁴⁸ DeYoung, 26.

way won't work and may cause you to feel worse."⁴⁹ The perfectionist who is anxious attempts to justify his thoughts. He justifies his ideas claiming that he is avoiding future problems or terrible situations. Instead, trying to think positively builds up frustration, the person views as validation that what he is doing is correct, and this thinking can turn into a repetitive loop.⁵⁰ The perfectionist thinks he is climbing out of the hole when in fact; he is digging a larger one. Therefore, the individual may not seek help because he sees what he is doing already as the solution to the problem. As a result, the individual draws himself further away from people, and show more excessive devotion to work and productivity.⁵¹

Stress and perfectionism left unattended turns into anxiety affecting different parts of the body. Some uneasiness is not dangerous, but can be helpful in operating at peak performance. However, anxiety may induce physical ailments. The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders Fifth Edition* (DSM-5) associated these physical symptoms with general anxiety disorder:

[Regarding] muscle tension, there may be trembling, twitching, feeling shaky, and muscle aches or soreness. Many individuals with generalized anxiety disorder also experience somatic symptoms (e.g., sweating, nausea, diarrhea) and an exaggerated startle response. Symptoms of autonomic hyperarousal (eg., accelerated heart rate, shortness of breath, dizziness) are less prominent in generalized anxiety disorder than in other anxiety disorders, such as panic disorder. Other conditions that may be associated with stress (eg., irritable bowel syndrome, headaches) frequently accompany generalized anxiety disorder.⁵²

A perfectionistic person does not necessarily have an anxiety disorder, but he is certainly more prone to it. Perfectionism will bring bouts of anxiety that may or may not last for extended periods of time, affecting mental and physical elements of the body.⁵³

⁴⁹ Chansky, 39.

⁵⁰ Chansky, 18-19.

⁵¹ *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-5* (Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Association, 2013), 679.

⁵² DSM-5, 223.

⁵³ There are far more elements that contribute to the health and psychological aspects of perfectionism and anxiety. This is simply a small snapshot of the entire picture.

PERFECTIONISM'S SEDUCTIONS FOR THE PASTOR

Perfectionism: The Attractive “Siren”

Greek Mythology has a variety of creatures such as the Sphinx, Cyclops, and Hydra. In addition to these mystical creatures, there is one as dangerous as the rest—the Siren, part woman part fish. While sailors traveled the high seas sailing from mission to mission, their paths occasionally crossed with this beautiful creature. The Siren's beauty was similar to that of a goddess, seducing the greatest of men who came before her. It was not only the Siren's beauty seducing these men of the sea—the siren's voice was equally entrancing. Her “siren's song” would entangle the men in a trance causing them to cast away their rules, values, and duties. As the sailors drew nearer to her, the Siren's clutches on the men grew stronger, ultimately dragging the sailor to his impending doom.

Unlike the sailor, the pastor does not encounter mythological creatures, or a siren's deadly voice. Instead, the pastor has to watch out for a different kind of “siren.” The pastor's “siren” today is perfectionism. This “siren” seeks to control the pastor with its seductive song and to drown him in the cold reality of his shortcomings.

Perfectionism's Seductive Song

Perfectionism, as a “siren,” attempts to control the pastor with its seductive song. It has no sympathy when it calls to him. Perfectionism endeavors to use its seductive song to control the pastor's heart, mind, and soul.

—To Control the Heart

When perfectionism sings its seductive song, the lyrics are filled with lies. These lies attempt to control the pastor's heart by appealing to his glory, honor, and self-recognition. The lie that the pastor is of the utmost importance in his life may motivate him toward perfectionism. There are several different ways a pastor may think of himself more highly than he ought. The pastor's calling is one way he may feel important. He may view his position as something higher and far more worthy than any other. He may be tempted to think God needs him more than he needs God. When the pastor is in this state of thinking, perfectionism may also become appealing to him. It may lead him to become more conceited.

Self-glorification or conceit is nothing new, whether conceit comes from perfectionism or not. Conceit seduces any man or woman. The fall into sin resulted from conceit. Adam and Eve ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil because they desired to become more “perfect” or more God-like.^{54,55} King Saul too was conceited. Saul was willing to kill anyone who prevented him from receiving the glory he thought he deserved, even if it meant attempting to kill the young and up-and-coming king—David.⁵⁶ There are other accounts in the Bible where conceit infected the hearts of both men and women, but this arrogance does not come from a perfect heart, rather from a heart corrupted by sin.

Perfectionism preys on the pastor’s sinful heart and attempts to persuade the pastor to focus his attention on himself and no one else. Daniel M. Deutschlander understood this conflict residing in the sinful heart of the pastor, when he wrote;

The goal of man by nature is to get his own way, to see the triumph of his own will. We may swallow hard when that is not possible. We may put on a pleasant smile to mask annoyance or anger or even hatred. But that does not change this fundamental fact of life: Life apart from Christ has meaning to the extent that I get my own way, that my will is victorious over the will of just about everyone else.⁵⁷

The pastor may fall into the trap of conceit while striving for something he desires; it may lead him to believe in his heart that he is the center of the universe.

With this conceit, the pastor who struggles with perfectionism is not chasing after the overarching goal, but rather a sub-goal of his choosing. The pastor discards the overarching goal of loving the Lord and others because, under the influence of perfectionism’s song, he wants nothing to do with it. Perfectionism is willing to compromise the pastor’s heart. Once the pastor’s heart is manipulated by perfectionism, he is willing to compromise anyone or anything to appear perfect. The pastor’s motivation under perfectionism is “getting of [his] own way, the accomplishment of [his] own will, getting things, getting ahead at the expense of another, all of

⁵⁴ New International Version (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Genesis 3.

⁵⁵ All Bible quotations are taken from the NIV 2011, unless otherwise noted.

⁵⁶ 1 Samuel 18:1-16.

⁵⁷ Daniel M. Deutschlander, *The Theology of the Cross: Reflections on His Cross and Ours* (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Pub. House, 2008), 14.

these are basically the same thing. They are the outward evidence of the assertion, indeed the worship, of *self*.”⁵⁸ Perfectionism uses conceit to seduce the pastor, and is not shy in strutting what it has to attract the pastor’s heart.

—To Control the Mind

Perfectionism seeks to seduce the pastor’s heart with its song as it also seeks to take control of his mind. The pastor’s heart, consumed with the lie of conceit, leads to other lies constantly repeating in his mind. These lies consume the pastor’s thoughts, causing him to assume God needs him more than he needs God. Therefore, placing his importance higher than it actually is. This concept of the pastor thinking he is more important than he is, is known as the “Messiah Complex”—the idea of a pastor thinking he has a noble calling where no limits apply to him—almost making him God-like.⁵⁹ G. Lloyd Rediger also explained the “Messiah Complex” this way, “A subtle sin against limits is the one in which we pastors act as if we do not or should not have the same limits of energy, insight, and time that we know other human beings have.”⁶⁰ This lack of limits leads the pastor with a “Messiah Complex” to think he is solely responsible to care for all people, to believe he is the only one accountable for his work, and to believe the ministry is the center of his life. With this much attention bloating the pastor’s arrogance, the pastor views himself as the only individual who can carry the weight of “the church” on his shoulders.

Since the pastor under perfectionism thinks he is important, anything less than his ultimate best or perfection will not suffice. A common phrase of encouragement among pastors, even other called workers in the WELS, is “Just do your best.” Though this phrase is often used in an encouraging manner, it may have an adverse effect on the pastor’s mind. When the concept of doing one’s best is carelessly directed toward the pastor, it validates what he is already thinking. The problem is not with the heart that says, “Just do your best” but rather the word “best.” When the pastor who struggles with perfectionism hears the word “best,” he equates best

⁵⁸ Deutschlander, 15.

⁵⁹ G. Lloyd Rediger, *Coping with Clergy Burnout* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1982), 29.

⁶⁰ Rediger, 29.

with perfection in his mind. “Best” in and of itself is not a bad word, but rather how the perfectionist views the word “best.” There are several ways the word “best” can be defined, but the definitions a perfectionist may refer to are, “one’s maximum effort <do your best>,” or “a best performance or achievement <ran a new personal best>.”⁶¹ This perspective of “best” leads the pastor to evaluate his product or effort. For example, this sermon is good, this one is better, and this one is the best. Since the perfectionist has a problem evaluating fairly, the concept of “best” may add more uncertainty for the individual. Therefore, one should be careful in using the word best or similar superlatives around a pastor who struggles with perfectionism. The pastor views his “best” as some past event that will never happen again or more likely an event that seems like some “pipe-dream.” Encouraging the pastor’s “best” causes him to focus even more on his ability, ultimately adding to his inflated or deflated ego.⁶²

The pastor may also struggle with the idea of “What is good enough?” when he considers words like “best.”⁶³ The pastor who struggles to evaluate quality and effort fairly will struggle to determine what is truly “good enough.” Since perfectionism causes the pastor to dispose of normal standards and create standards beyond reach, the pastor equates “good enough” with perfection or unrealistic goals. The perfectionist may view “good enough” as a failure because he did not reach his standard or goals. However, if the individual did reach one of his goals, he senses no accomplishment because he was simply doing what he was supposed to do in the first place. Ph.D. Leon F. Seltzer explained the conflict of unrealistic goals or standards this way:

When a perfectionist manages to do something extravagantly well, they can only breathe a sigh of relief. This time, at least, they’ve avoided failure—which nonetheless continues to haunt them, as time and again they joylessly struggle to do the next thing perfectly . . . and the next, and the next.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Merriam-Webster, accessed November 29, 2016, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/best>.

⁶² It may be possible to use the phrase best, if in reference to God doing his best through us. However, this is not how the word best is often used.

⁶³ It is important to think about whether or not the phrase, “just be faithful” has the same effect as “best,” or “what is good enough?”

⁶⁴ Leon Seltzer, Ph.D., "How Do You Know What's Good Enough?," *Psychology Today*, October 16, 2013, accessed November 29, 2016, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/evolution-the-self/201310/how-do-you-know-whats-good-enough>.

The phrase “good enough” may encourage a pastor who struggles with perfectionism to give into those lofty standards he manufactured.

Another reason the phrase “good enough” should be cautiously used around a pastor who struggles with perfectionism is because the standard of “good enough” changes from task to task. Seltzer also stated the problem with “good enough” is, “In short, what might be good enough in most areas might not be good enough in others—not, at least, where nothing short of faultlessness, or flawlessness, will do.”⁶⁵ The inconsistency of “good enough” is what makes interpreting it for some so difficult, even for the pastor. A standard requiring near “flawless” results cannot be applied to every task. Since the pastor struggles with differentiating quality, the use of generalized words or phrases simply encourages him to attack every task with a “flawless” standard that is unrealistic and humanly impossible.

With these comparatives such as “best” and “good enough,” the pastor under perfectionism finds it easy to compare himself to others. Since the perfectionist focuses on his shortcomings, he compares his negatives with someone else’s positives. This may hold true for a pastor whose abilities are above average. Malcolm Gladwell quoted a study analyzing the dropout rate of prestigious colleges to colleges that are not so prestigious. Even though the students of the prestigious college had better test scores, their drop-out rates were the same as their non-prestigious college counterparts. The students of the prestigious college were looking at their weaknesses and comparing them to those who ranked higher in the class. Their inaccurate comparisons eventually lead them to drop-out.⁶⁶ This same improper evaluation could also occur with a skilled pastor. He does not realize what part of the body of Christ he is operating as. The pastor is simply looking for the gifts he does not have, instead of the gifts he does.

—To Control the Body

Perfectionism clearly wants to take control of the pastor’s mind, but it also desires to take control of his body. This “siren-like-trance” attempts to control the pastor’s body to dedicate all his efforts to perfectionism. The pastor who falls into this trap does this first by becoming busier

⁶⁵ Seltzer.

⁶⁶ Malcolm Gladwell, *David and Goliath: Underdogs, Misfits, and the Art of Battling Giants*, Large Print (New York: Little Brown & Company, 2013), 102-161.

and working perfectly. The more he works, the more he becomes vain in what he does. The perfectionist looks at the demands on his life as proof he is someone. Eugene Peterson warns of this possible vanity a pastor may have due to his work by saying, “I am busy because I am vain. I want to appear important. Significant. What better way than to be busy? The incredible hours, the crowded schedule, and the heavy demands on my time are proof to myself—and to all who will notice—that I am important.”⁶⁷ Perfectionism’s busyness becomes like a mistress to the pastor. He hunches over his computer late at night, fixing and correcting what he views as important. He meticulously invests significant amounts of time refining his Bible studies, devotions, sermons, and anything else he has to do because he does not understand what “best” or “good enough” means. While consumed with a task, the pastor forgets about all the other tasks he still needs to do. He stares at his schedule seeing no open slots where work could go. The pastor simply stays up later applying the same standards. Finally, after long hours and giving into perfectionism’s seduction, he goes home to a wife who is already in bed, and children whom he has not seen all day.

The pastor might stop others from contributing to the church because perfectionism is attempting to control his body. He may not allow people to contribute due to a variety of selfish reasons. The pastor may think his members will not complete tasks to meet his high standards. Alternatively, he may want to confirm his importance by doing everything. Paul David Tripp expressed this conceit in the pastor and his inability to allow others to help:

You, when you are full of yourself, when you are too self-assured, will tend to think that you’re the most capable person in the circle of your ministry. You will find it hard to recognize and esteem the God-given gifts of others, and because you don’t, you will find it hard to make your ministry a community process. Thinking of yourself more highly than you ought to think always leads to looking down on others in some way.⁶⁸

By not allowing others to help, the pastor may save himself time in the short run, but over the long haul, he is ultimately hurting himself and the congregation. The pastor simply cannot do everything he thinks he can.

⁶⁷ Eugene H. Peterson, *The Contemplative Pastor: Returning to the Art of Spiritual Direction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub., 1993), 18.

⁶⁸ Paul David Tripp, *Dangerous Calling: Confronting the Unique Challenges of Pastoral Ministry* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 180.

With all the hard work and time the pastor endures, he may be tempted by laziness. If perfectionism can seduce a pastor into doing what it wants, perfectionism's mistress, laziness, can do the same. Laziness uses similar tactics as perfectionism, with slightly different results. Laziness convinces the pastor that caring less about his work is the solution to overworking or putting in too much effort.⁶⁹ The motivation for laziness is also shame and pride. DeYoung stated laziness is not the answer:

Some people think that if they don't give a rip about the opinions of others and maintain an ambition-less life then they will have conquered pride. But again, real life does not always jibe with our tidy logic. Taming busyness is not as simple as saying no to everything and refusing to please anyone.⁷⁰

Laziness will never be the solution for a pastor. Simply eliminating the high standards, does not help or wipe out what still is in his heart and mind—conceit.

Perfectionism's Cold Reality

When the sailors were finally caught in the Siren's grasp, she would drag them down in the deep waters—ultimately bringing the sailors to their cold demise. If the pastor perceives perfectionism or laziness as better options, underneath perfectionism's facade is a dark abyss. The cold reality is that the pastor will never achieve perfection, and his conceit will bring about his death.

From the pastor's perspective under perfectionism, he truly believes perfection is possible; however, the cold reality is that perfection is never achievable on this earth. It does not matter how hard he wants it or tries to achieve it. He always falls short of achieving his desired perfection. The only way he can "achieve perfection" is if he changes the standards by which perfection is played. With these changed rules, the pastor will never achieve perfection because he is not perfect. He is corrupted by sin, the same sin that universally damns everyone.

Sinfulness falls short of God's perfection as Paul said to the Romans, "For all have sinned and

⁶⁹ Dr. Chris Thurman stated there are two different kinds of people, the "facers" who put in the extra work and the "avoiders" those who waste time by worrying. He also added, "In life 'avoiders' ignore problems, hoping they will either go away or be solved by others for them. Of course, we all know that problems don't go away and that our lives get much worse when we are unwilling to face them" (Chris Thurman, *The Lies We Believe* (Nashville: T. Nelson Publishers, 1995), 18-19).

⁷⁰ DeYoung, 38.

fall short of the glory of God.”⁷¹

The pastor may have a higher calling, but this does not mean he is any different from the rest of humanity. He is still human. He is still sinful. He has the same mortal problem as the grandma in the back of his church, and as the newborn child who was baptized on Sunday. His lack of perfection is a rift in his relationship with the one who is truly perfect. Paul David Tripp expressed this rift caused by sin, “Sin is first and foremost about breaking relationship with God, and because I have broken this relationship, it is then easy and natural to rebel against God’s rules.”⁷² The pastor’s sinful nature wants nothing to do with God. Instead, it wants adoration. The adoration the sinful nature desires comes from what the pastor does. The pastor understands this, and he also understands what God demands. God demands perfection. The pastor knows the Scriptures supports this requirement of perfection. As Jesus told the people in his Sermon on the Mount, “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”⁷³ The pastor may be drawn to think he has what it takes to be perfect as the Lord demands. In spite of his faith in Jesus’ perfection, he is tempted to think a little more effort and a little more perfection might allow him to avoid the pains of hell.

Perfectionism contributes to this struggle raging in the pastor’s sinful heart. Recognition may seem like an admirable goal to the world, but this desire will simply bring about a cold death like any other sin. The pastor who tries to work harder on his own will not avoid it. He may be tempted to focus more on doing everything correctly. He may try to avoid it all together. However, the pastor will end up in the same situation as everyone else. If left in perfectionism’s clutches, conceit would leave the pastor’s cold, lifeless body dead in the ground. Anyone who thinks he can earn God’s favor or earn his way to heaven simply by what he does receives something worse than physical death. The pastor who completely gives himself over to his sinful nature runs the risk of being eternally separated from God.

⁷¹ Romans 3:23.

⁷² Tripp, 26.

⁷³ Matthew 5:48.

A PASTOR STRIVES FOR EXCELLENCE

Perfection Makes Excellence Possible

For a pastor to be able to strive for excellence, perfection must happen first. The fact that perfection comes before excellence certainly seems like a contradiction of what was stated about perfectionism. Because of sin, the perfection that makes excellence possible cannot originate from a pastor. Rather, this perfection has to come from someone who is already perfect: Jesus Christ. DeYoung stated, “And like everyone else, your joy, your heart, and your soul are in danger. We need the Word of God to set us free. We need biblical wisdom to set us straight. What we need is the Great Physician to heal our...souls.”⁷⁴ The only one who can claim this position is God. God saw the problem sin was causing in the hearts of his pastors. He knew what dangers perfectionism was causing, and more broadly the impact sin had had on the world he created. No person was able to be perfect to save himself from sin’s grasp—except for one. Only one person, who was born without sin, could save the sin-sick pastor.

For this reason, God sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to save the world, including the pastor who struggles with perfectionism. Jesus was without sin, unlike any human being before or after him. No flaw was found in him and everything he did was done perfectly and excellently. As the Apostle Peter said when quoting Isaiah 53:9, “He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.”⁷⁵ Jesus Christ was the only one able not to sin because he was both God and man. The God of heaven and earth “was made lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.”⁷⁶ Jesus was the only one who could save the pastor from his struggle with perfectionism. He paid for this sin and others by living a perfect life and dying an innocent death. By his resurrection, Jesus validated his perfection and the perfection won for all people as Paul stated to the Romans, “He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our

⁷⁴ DeYoung, 32.

⁷⁵ 1 Peter 2:22.

⁷⁶ Hebrews 2:9.

justification.”⁷⁷ Clothed in Christ’s blood, the pastor is given the gift of perfection, and power to strive for excellence. Peter emphasized, “His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence.”⁷⁸ Therefore, by Jesus saving work, the pastor is now able to strive for excellence in his sanctified life.⁷⁹

Striving for Excellence as Both Sinner and Saint

The pastor always lives his sanctified life with two different part to him. One part of the pastor is a sinner and the other a saint. This sinful nature attempts to take advantage of the pastor’s situation, allied with Satan and the world. They continuously throw temptation at the pastor, and he will struggle against them. Paul understood this struggle of the pastor when he said,

I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.⁸⁰

This struggle is difficult for the pastor. These temptations do not only come at him when his guard is up, but they also flank him when it is down.

However, the sinner residing in the pastor no longer has its hold on him, because of God’s grace the saint residing in the pastor triumphs. The saint inside the pastor does not establish its rule because of anything he has done, but because of everything Jesus has done. Paul understood this when he said to the Romans, “Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus

⁷⁷ Romans 4:25.

⁷⁸ 2 Peter 1:3.

⁷⁹ “Members of our theological colloquium began to refer to this as ‘cruciform excellence,’ an excellence grounded in the bed-rock conviction that God’s excellence—God’s power, righteousness and love—is most fully visible in Jesus’ life and ministry, culminating in the cross and resurrection” (Collins, 197).

⁸⁰ Romans 5:15-20.

Christ our Lord.”⁸¹ This conflict between the two natures will continue until the pastor dies or the Lord returns again. When these events come to pass he will no longer struggle with flaws, mistakes, or disabilities. Until then, the pastor struggles to strive for excellence as both sinner and saint in goals, time, effort, and skill.

Excellence In Goals

As a saint who has already been declared righteous and perfect in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, the pastor now lives his life to strive for excellence in the true overarching goal of loving the Lord and others. The sinful world struggles to identify the true overarching goal, but the overarching goal for the pastor is made known to him through God’s Word. The overarching goal of the pastor, as a saint, according to the Word is to love the Lord and to show love to all people. Jesus stated this overarching goal to the Pharisees, who were teachers of the law, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”⁸² The pastor who lives to strive for excellence has a clear understanding of his overarching goal because the Holy Spirit has revealed it to him in his baptism and the Word. The pastor lives to love the Lord and everyone else because he received love from God. The pastor's overarching goal has ultimately been fulfilled in Jesus’ perfect love.

The overarching goal of loving the Lord and others is a perfect overarching goal for the pastor who lives to strive for excellence. This overarching goal is perfect first and foremost because God gave it and everything he does is perfect. Secondly, it is also perfect because loving the Lord and others requires a pastor to focus on something greater than himself. The pastor as a saint, is not motivated by a reward or recognition as he strives for the overarching goal. Rather he strives for the overarching goal because he simply wants to show his love to the Lord and others. He shows this love by doing what Jesus encouraged everyone to do, “Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my

⁸¹ Romans 5:25.

⁸² Matthew 22:37-39.

disciples, if you love one another.”⁸³ Since God has shown this surpassing love, the pastor naturally shares this love with others. He does not do this by his own power, but receives strength from God to live this life of love.⁸⁴

The pastor attempts to dedicate his life to achieving the overarching goal of loving the Lord and others, but he also attempts to devote his life to the sub-goals. The pastor does this by focusing first and foremost on the cross, and applying the same standards of the overarching goal to the sub-goals. Some of the sub-goals associated with a pastor's public ministry are his sermons, Bible studies, confirmation classes, worship services, bulletins, shut-ins, hospital visits, door to door surveys, and the list could go on and on. As the pastor focuses on these sub-goals, he shows love to those in his congregation and community.

The pastor has sub-goals in his private life that may appear to be less important; however, they are equally important as the goals of his public ministry. One of those sub-goals is spending time with the family. The pastor who is married or has children desires to spend time with his family because he loves them and he loves God.⁸⁵ What God says in his Word helps the pastor show love to his wife and children. The apostle Paul emphasizes, “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her.”⁸⁶ The pastor who is a husband, does this not out of obligation, but rather out of desire. He attempts to give his wife the time she needs and the love she desires. As for the pastor with children, he also takes the words of Paul to heart when he says, “Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the

⁸³ John 13:34-35.

⁸⁴ “For it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose” (Philippians 2:13).

⁸⁵ Jay E. Adams emphasized the importance of this fact, “No more critical matter can be considered since it is probably in this area that more pastors and more families suffer than in any other. Nothing can make a man more ineffective than bearing the weight of concern that comes from a bad marital relationship. When he also carries about guilt arising from failure as a parent, the load can become back breaking. Moreover, too many pastors are plagued day by day with family difficulties occasioned by small salaries, high demands upon time and for quality performance, tensions between allegiance to the job and to the home, the tugs of large opportunities and the need to meet regular obligations, and dozens of similar considerations. Unless he can resolve the matters by getting control of his time and energies, the pastor will be doomed to a life of unnecessary struggle, confusion and despair, centering itself in the family and causing frequent upheavals and heartache. In no area is it easier for a minister to become discouraged and leave the ministry” (Jay E. Adams, *The Pastoral Life* (Place of Publication Not Identified: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub., 1975), 32).

⁸⁶ Ephesians 5:25.

training and instruction of the Lord.”⁸⁷ The pastor shows love to his children by not being heavy handed with them, by giving appropriate time to talk with them, and by helping them with their homework. Both single and married pastors attempt to set aside time to check in with parents or other siblings. Family plays a major role in attempting to accomplish the sub-goals.

The pastor also focuses on other sub-goals such as sleeping or rest, hobbies, and fitness in an effort to take care of his body. The body the pastor was given, is a temple of the Holy Spirit. The body is something to be cherished and honored by the pastor as the Scriptures say in 1 Corinthians, “Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.”⁸⁸ The pastor’s body has been redeemed by Jesus and it has been given to him to spread the saving message. Therefore, the pastor wants to seek adequate sleep or rest to be rejuvenated for his goals. Sleep is only part of a pastor’s rejuvenation. The pastor should also consider a day of rest. The time a pastor takes off varies from pastor to pastor and situation to situation. This practice should apply to pastors with or without families.⁸⁹ No matter the situation the pastor is in, he desires to honor God by scheduling adequate sleep and time off.

Another sub-goal that benefits the pastor’s body is his overall fitness. Motivated by Christ’s love the pastor attempts to eat healthy foods and be physically active. The pastor does this by nourishing his body with proper nutritious foods; he takes care of his body by establishing a workout program that best suits his situation and needs. He understands his body benefits from these practices. For example, “Exercising just one time has immediate mental and emotional benefits. Exercise that is strenuous to the proper degree can relieve stress and anxiety and elevate one’s mood right away.”⁹⁰ The pastor’s efforts in working out helps him have a

⁸⁷ Ephesians 6:4.

⁸⁸ 1 Corinthians 6:19-20.

⁸⁹ Adams, 52-53.

⁹⁰ Nathan F. Loersch, “The Impact of Regular Physical Exercise On The Pastor And His Ministry,” accessed November 29, 2016, <http://essays.wls.wels.net/bitstream/handle/123456789/32/Loersch.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>, 15.

clearer mind and strength to go about his daily goals. Even though these benefits are significant, the pastor cares for his body to thank God for it. The concept of thankfulness in what a pastor eats or does is emphasized in 1 Corinthians, “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.”⁹¹ No matter if the pastor is eating an apple or doing sit-ups, he can do it for God’s glory.

The pastor focuses on his hobbies, these hobbies are beneficial in clearing his mind from worries or concerns. Depending on the hobbies the pastor chooses, the hobby may involve other individuals. Interacting with other people gives the pastor opportunities to show his love for his Lord and to them. He is eager to interact with people from the community because “Everywhere that he goes and in everything that he does (like every Christian, but, as the [...] community looks at it: unofficially) he represents Jesus Christ.”⁹² Therefore, if the pastor decides to be part of a volleyball league, men’s choir, or book club, he gives himself the opportunity to show his love for the Lord and his love for the people he interacts with. All these sub-goals and many others are necessary for the pastor’s struggle to achieve excellence in the overarching goal of loving the Lord and others.

Excellence In Time

The pastor attempts to strive for excellence in both the overarching goal and the sub-goals in his time management. The pastor who desires to be excellent in time is patient with time and forgives the time used incorrectly. In a world where the pastor is running from Bible class to church meetings, to his children’s events, the pastor values each and every second of his time. He manages his time because God gave the pastor time to spread the Word and show love to him and others. The pastor also values time because there are unending obligations and people demanding a segment of his time. Jay E. Adams explained the importance of controlling time, “Only when the pastor has gained control of his time can he begin to find the opportunities in

⁹¹ 1 Corinthians 10:31.

⁹² Adams, 54.

freedom to live as a Christian...”⁹³ If the pastor disregards his time and refuses to value it, he will struggle to strive for excellence in all the areas he needs to.

The pastor who strives for excellence desires to value time, and since he values time, the pastor is patient with the time given him. A pastor understands time is fleeting. He may wonder at the end of the day where all his time went. The time given a pastor is not enough to accomplish everything he desires. The pastor comprehends that time operates this way, but since he is a saint, is patient with it. Therefore out of thanks for the gift of time, the pastor perseveres with the time God grants in the days ahead.⁹⁴

Finally, the pastor forgives himself for time used incorrectly. In the pastor’s ministry, there will be occasions where he should have used his time more wisely. Instead he was inefficient, putting too much time in a task or not enough. However, the pastor will run to the cross to receive the blessing of forgiveness for his failure to use time appropriately. This does not mean that he will keep doing what he has been, but he will not blame time or continually blame himself. Motivated by Christ’s forgiveness the pastor will change how he treats time—emphasizing the importance of managing time instead of it controlling him. Rediger advised, “... Take charge of [y]our schedules and set limits or they will take charge of [you] and demand more than [you] have to give.”⁹⁵ The pastor will need God’s help in time management while striving for excellence.

Excellence In Effort

The pastor knows he is both a sinner and saint, and strives for excellence in effort. The efforts he puts into achieving the overarching goal and sub-goals are hindered by the sinner inside him. The sinner inside him causes his efforts to fluctuate over time, and influence how the pastor views his effort in the past, present, and future when he attempts to strive for excellence.

⁹³ Adams, 39.

⁹⁴ Horton, 23.

⁹⁵ Rediger, 63.

—Effort in the Past

The pastor is able to evaluate his past efforts because they span time. The pastor who strives for excellence knows his past efforts and failures are forgiven. On the one hand, there have been times in the past where the pastor's efforts were lazy, not doing his job adequately, forcing others to do his job, or neglecting his tasks altogether. On the other hand, the pastor may have put in obscene amounts of time into his perfectionistic tendencies and neglected his other goals in the process. This ultimately causes the pastor to dwell on past mistakes or gloat over past successes.

However, the saint in the pastor understands Christ's active obedience forgives these instances. Since Jesus lived a perfect life in place of the pastor, his perfection covers all the wrong doings and failed efforts of the pastor. Therefore as a saint and sinner, the pastor understands past efforts are forgiven, and he looks to his baptism as a reminder of what Christ has done for him.⁹⁶ The Colossians were reminded to look at their baptism in the same way, "Having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead."⁹⁷ The forgiveness Christ has given the pastor motivates him to forget past shortcomings because God no longer remembers them. Instead, the pastor evaluates past efforts equitably and accurately in his daily struggle to strive for excellence.⁹⁸

—Effort in the Present

While a pastor strives for excellence, his neutral evaluation of past efforts is used to modify his present efforts. The pastor by himself is unable to do this; however, with the power of the Holy Spirit at work through the gospel, he is given strength to manage effort in the present. For Paul stated, "It is God who works in us to will and to do according to his good pleasure."⁹⁹

⁹⁶ "We return to our baptism daily to find our true identity in Christ rather than in ourselves" (Horton, 128).

⁹⁷ Colossians 2:12.

⁹⁸ "Our own motives and efforts in ministry are often a strange mixture of sin and grace, skill and frailty" (Collins, 197).

⁹⁹ Philippians 2:13.

Since God is at work in the pastor, the pastor can make appropriate changes and modifications to how he uses his effort in the present.

The pastor motivated by thanks for Jesus is focused on his effort and on the task or tasks he is currently working on. With his thankfulness, he does all he can on the tasks with the time he has available for it. However, he does not go about these tasks by working harder. If the pastor tries to work harder, he risks fatigue and burnout. Rediger explained effort this way, “[Effort] does not mean we have to try harder. In fact trying harder only drains more energy and makes us more vulnerable to burnout.”¹⁰⁰ The pastor simply does what God desires with his time because he wants to live his life of love. Therefore, he focuses his effort in an appropriate and balanced way in the present to please his Savior.

—**Effort in the Future**

Finally, the pastor who strives for excellence understands there will be opportunities to put forth effort in the future, if God intends it. The new man urges the pastor to continue striving ahead toward excellence—always adapting and pursuing the overarching goal outside of himself until God calls him home. This means the pastor will not worry about the future, but plan accordingly. The pastor will also trust that God has control of the future. For God says, “Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.”¹⁰¹ The pastor, who understands the protection God gives him, strives into the future with confidence that he is not alone.

Excellence In Skill

A pastor might benefit from knowing what skills he possesses in striving for excellence, and he might also benefit in knowing how to improve those skills over time. In the Wisconsin Synod, there are about 1500 active parish pastors. When comparing skills of pastors, similarities can be discovered. However, at the same time no pastor is the same, each has unique skills. God is the one who gave each pastor his unique abilities for his unique purpose. These particular skills God gives each pastor are used in the ministry, as well as in the body of Christ. Paul proves

¹⁰⁰ Rediger, 58.

¹⁰¹ Deuteronomy 31:6.

pastors and their skills have a purpose in the body of Christ by stating, “Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.”¹⁰² The pastor cherishes his skills and uses them to contribute to the body of Christ.

How the pastor uses his skills in the body of Christ depends upon the skill. It can be difficult for a pastor to identify his specific skill(s). Rath commented on this struggle, “One big problem is that most people are either unaware of, or unable to describe, their own strengths...or the strengths of the people around them.”¹⁰³ For example, if a person lacks music skills and is asked to direct a choir, this would not be a good use of his skills. If the individual has the skill of talking to strangers, maybe it would be best to use this skill instead. It is important for the pastor to know his stronger skills to better utilize them in the body of Christ.

As the pastor uses his skills to show love to his Lord and others, the pastor aims to be content with the skills God has given him. The reason a pastor is content with his skills is because God has given him his own role in the body of Christ:

God has placed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance, and of different kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? ³⁰ Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? ³¹ Now eagerly desire the greater gifts.¹⁰⁴

Though a pastor has a different role than others in the body of Christ, there are many differences between pastors and their skills. Despite having differences pastors work in harmony with each other using these skills to spread the greatest gift of the Savior.

The pastor certainly focus on using his skills in striving for excellence, but he makes an effort to improve both his strengths and weaknesses in the process. Since striving for excellence is not content being stagnant, the pastor seeks ways to improve his skills that come naturally, in addition to improving those that do not. Methods to improve these skills could include continued education, research, or practice. The pastor motivated by Christ’s endless love strives to improve

¹⁰² 1 Corinthians 12:27.

¹⁰³ Rath, 13.

¹⁰⁴ 1 Corinthians 12:28-31.

his skills during his entire lifetime. He does not improve his skills for his glory, but rather to give glory to his Lord.

CONCLUSION

Perfectionism does not literally swoop from the sky or drag someone down into the deep cold sea, but perfectionism nonetheless is equally dangerous and should be taken seriously. Perfectionism is dangerous because it has a significant impact on the pastor's life and ministry. The pastor who struggles with perfectionism knows his sinful nature causes him to become conceited. However, the pastor is no longer ruled by the sinful nature residing inside him. Rather, he is made perfect by Christ's redeeming blood making the pastor God's saint. Therefore as a saint, the pastor no longer strives for what perfectionism desires, but wants to strive for excellence. He strives for excellence in the overarching goal of loving the Lord and others. The pastor is motivated by thankfulness for what Jesus has done for him. With this thankfulness, the pastor attempts to strive for excellence in his ministry. The pastor who strives for excellence in his ministry will have the opportunity to show love to the Lord and others in endless ways. The struggle between perfectionism and excellence is not easy. Perfectionism manipulates the goals, standards, emotions, skills, efforts, and health of a pastor. God's grace enables the pastor to strive for excellence despite perfectionism's obstacles. While seeking excellence in the overarching goal, the pastor manages his time, harnesses his skills, and directs his efforts. Every day until Jesus returns, the pastor focuses on Jesus' perfection instead of attempting to achieve perfection on his own. Until that beautiful day, the pastor finds strength and encouragement through Word and Sacrament, struggling daily to strive for excellence while avoiding perfectionism.

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