

The Problems with Trying to be Perfect

By Kathryn Huls, Psy.D., HSPP, Clinical/School Psychologist



Children mastering a musical instrument or a sport, Christians longing to become more like Christ, teens striving for terrific GPA's and college scholarships and adults running households or aspiring toward promotions at work all face similar challenges, doubts and concerns regarding success. Some are able to enjoy the journey, recover quickly from setbacks, and move forward. Others, however, become engulfed by perceived failures, always critical of mistakes even when the final outcome is pleasing to an objective observer.

As a mom of three competitive swimmers, I became interested in the topic of perfectionism while observing their meets. I wondered how some swimmers appeared tense and unhappy with every swim time, even when they were "personal bests," and others rejoiced over 7th

place. Perfectionism appeared to be both a plague and a motivator, but at what cost?

As Richard Winter writes in *"Perfecting Ourselves to Death: The Pursuit of Excellence and the Perils of Perfectionism,"* a book I highly recommend for those wishing to delve deeper into the topic, "...the problem with perfectionism begins when we move beyond the legitimate pursuit of excellence to live under the tyranny of believing that perfection is possible and failures are unacceptable. Standards of productivity, accomplishment or appearance are so high that they are impossible to attain." The self-focus and negative self-appraisal found in perfectionism rob individuals of joy and distract them from the peace of glorifying God with our best efforts, not our perfect efforts.

Interpersonally, perfectionists sometimes project unrealistic expectations onto others, which can lead to significantly strained relationships. Those close to perfectionists likely struggle to understand their dissatisfaction with themselves, and may become frustrated or discouraged when no efforts to please the perfectionist seem sufficient. Additionally, it may be difficult to establish intimate relationships with a

perfectionist, as he or she often avoid transparency for fear of disclosing imperfections.

When is it good to seek outside counseling? When one's thought processes are critical for maintaining perfectionism, as typically a perfectionist dwells upon mistakes and engages in "all or nothing thinking" such as "I have to be the best or I am worthless." Most individuals need help from a professional to identify and develop strategies for combating those thoughts, which are often rooted in messages received (or perceived) early on in life.

Additionally, as one might imagine, the cycle of unrealistically high standards resulting in an astronomical rate of "failure" predisposes someone to a host of psychological maladies including depression (to the point of suicidal thoughts/attempts), eating disorders, anxiety and obsessions, which all likely necessitate professional intervention.

In therapy, individuals begin examining the thoughts that drive their perfectionism, often "oughts" and "shoulds" that can be eliminated when one becomes less driven by a fear of failure and more focused upon grace received, then extended toward oneself and others.

Signs You May Struggle with Perfectionism

- You are unable to enjoy the pursuit of a goal or celebrate its achievement.
- You struggle to recover/bounce back from a perceived failure.
- You are critical of your accomplishments even when others see them as successes.
- You believe that perfection is possible.
- You believe that failure is unacceptable.
- Even your best efforts don't bring a sense of accomplishment.
- Your expectations of others make them feel inadequate and discouraged.
- You think you have to be the best or you are worthless.

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Our Mission

New Leaf Resources promotes healthy relationships and personal growth through counseling, education, and consultation from a Christian perspective.

Reviving the Spark

by Angie Cerniglia, Associate Marriage & Therapist

Sex is a vital part of every marriage, and I think we can all agree that there is something remarkable about the passionate connections we make with our partners.

It probably doesn't come as a surprise that a lot of well-meaning relatives and friends like to give advice to and joke with young couples in the early years of their marriage about how the sexual passion fades after the honeymoon. I'm sure you've heard something like, "Enjoy those first years, after that things get pretty uninteresting."

Receiving these types of messages over and over from family, friends and the media drives the idea that great sex is impelled by our

biology, physiology or the excitement of first being married. All these ideas, however, ignore the most vital piece to having a thriving and connective intimate relationship: our emotional connections.

All the messages we receive tell us that great sex starts, and ends, in the bedroom. What we need to realize is that great sex starts outside of the bedroom.

Building an emotional connection with your partner is the fuel behind the match that ignites the intimacy in your marriage. That fuel can be created by talking about your intimate life together; people always joke that communication is the foundation of any great marriage, but they don't talk about it



being the foundation of great sex. Talk about what you like, dislike, what makes you feel connected and what makes you feel pursued.

Strike the match outside of the bedroom with kissing, hugging, cuddling, and hand holding--build the intimate connection and excitement daily. Take time to flirt with and pursue your spouse. Make building your intimacy a priority by increasing the emotional connection between the two of you with time together. Find common interests or activities that you can do as a couple.

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Helping Students Prepare for School Year

For the second year in a row, Therapists **Donna Southard** and **Darla McKim** participated in the DeMotte "Back-to-School" Fair.

Organizers of the event brought together community groups and businesses which helped distribute donated school supplies and other resources to local children and their families from the Kankakee Valley area.

Through a grant from **Thrivent Financial**, New Leaf purchased and distributed three-ring binders and information about our ministry to the students.



Therapists **Donna Southard** and **Darla McKim**, with help from their daughters, distributed school supplies to local children at the DeMotte "Back-to-School" Fair. The annual event helps defray the cost of purchasing school supplies for local families.

Counseling Sheds Light at the End of the Tunnel

A client recently shared how her experience at New Leaf Resources has given her hope, help and healing.

"I first sought counseling because of the stress of being a single mom to two teenagers. Then the divorce. Then the loss of my 20 year old daughter. It was sudden.

(Counseling) helps me be able to talk to somebody without judgement. Helps me put things into perspective. It helps me more than I can say. My therapist is the best! I don't feel alone. I know there is a light at the end of the tunnel.

(I have learned) deep breathing, journaling, letting myself

enjoy life. I look forward to another day.

Words cannot express how grateful I am for the generosity of the donors. Money is extra tight with my husband out of work because of an illness. Thank you, thank you, thank you!"

**- "Nancy," 45
in therapy for depression,
anxiety and grief**



What's "New" at New Leaf

Congratulations to Therapist **Evie DavyRomano** and her husband **Carl** on the birth of their daughter **Layla Ann!** She joins big sister, **Piper**, at home.

We extend our sincerest condolences to Board Member **Dave Larsen** on the recent loss of his wife, **Cathy**. You and your family have our deepest sympathies.

This past August, Executive Director **Terry Top** celebrated his 30th Anniversary with the ministry. He began his career with New Leaf (formerly the Christian Care Center) as the Director of Education & Training assisting family outreach teams in churches with interventions.

Since those early days, Terry has become a fully licensed Marriage & Family Therapist, served as the Clinical Supervisor and took over the reins of the ministry as the Executive Director when **Dr. Rich Grevengoed** retired in 2003.



During a surprise celebration of Executive Director Terry Top's 30th Anniversary, Clinical Supervisor Norm LeClercq (right) hands Terry a hat representing one of the many "hats" Terry wears at New Leaf.

"I don't feel alone. I know there is a light at the end of the tunnel."
- "Nancy,"
a client

Reviving the Spark

(Continued from page 2)

Maybe you both enjoy watching sports or exercising together. Whatever the activity, intentionally scheduling time to enjoy each other's company in a shared activity can also bring you closer emotionally. By building an emotional connection in your mar-

riage, you will amplify the connection in your intimate life. Your spark may not just relight, but it may be stronger than ever! Someday, you might even be the well-meaning relative that instead of warning a young couple of disappointment ahead can tell them that the best is yet to come.

Special Gifts

Contributions to New Leaf Resources can be made in memory or in honor of a loved one or friend.

Thank you to the following donors:

**In Memory of
Paul Lindemulder**
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**In Memory of
Bernie Top**
Dr. Rich & Barb Grevengoed

Save a tree

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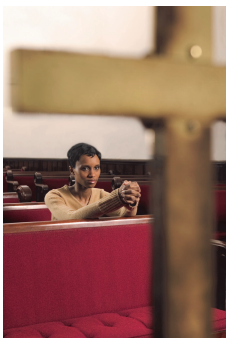
Kass' Quotes

A compilation of Therapist
Kass Cooper's favorite quips & quotes,
humorous & inspirational.

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Fall 2015

Resources for Our Local Churches



In the Christian community, New Leaf offers a variety of educational services, prevention programs, speaking opportunities, training and support for area churches:

- **Training** for Elders, Deacons, Stephen Ministry, Church Leaders.
- **Guest speakers** for ministry groups such as MOP's, Coffee Break, GEM's Leaders, Youth Groups and others.
- **Sunday School/Bible Study** talks.
- Bi-weekly **Pastor's Support Group**.

- **Phone consultation** for pastors dealing with a difficult situation.

If you have any questions or are interested in more information, contact Executive Director **Terry Top** at (708) 895-7310.

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Sign up today to receive New Leaf Resources quarterly Newsletter either in the mail or sent to your inbox. We provide helpful information, informative articles and many stories of hope, help and healing. Call (708) 895-7310 or email terri@newleafresources.org.

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New Leaf Resources is...

A **professional mental health agency** which provides counseling and consultation services to individuals, families, couples, children, churches, schools and businesses.

A **ministry** which brings the best possible care to those we serve, striving to reflect God's grace and love to all who seek help.

A **community resource** offering educational services, prevention programs, training, support and coaching.



Celebrating 
35 years of
hope, help & healing