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FROM BEHIND THE PULPIT, USING COLLAGE IN ARTS-INFORMED  
RESEARCH TO SHARE STORIES OF CLERGY FACING PERFECTIONISM

by

Eden Emily Ross

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of St. Stephen's College in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

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In dedication to the stories that have not yet been shared.

## ABSTRACT

This research utilizes an arts-informed approach to witness the stories of four Pentecostal pastors in Alberta who have experience with perfectionism in their lives. Collage and verbal dialogue help to communicate the spiritual impact that perfectionism can have. The root of this research topic has come from my personal journey with perfectionism, of which I share in some detail.

The experiences of pastors with perfectionism are of particular interest to me. I believe the quality and longevity of their work lies in the health of their spiritual relationships with God. The career of pastoral ministry, however, is known to have certain stressors within it that at times cause pastors to quit. Certain forms of perfectionism are also known to cause stress. The hope was to discover whether perfectionism impacted pastors spiritually, and what their experiences were like.

The information this research reveals is that maladaptive perfectionism is spiritually negative. In addition, working through maladaptive perfectionism is seen to result in spiritually beneficial changes. The final piece shows adaptive perfectionism can have a positive spiritual impact. These findings offer insight into possible reasons pastors leave ministry, and may help prevent future disintegrations.

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My parents have generously given, as they have my entire life, and I cannot thank them enough for how incredibly selfless they are. My family and friends have encouraged me far more than they could possibly know.

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## Introduction

My research question is, “How does perfectionism impact the spiritual lives of Pentecostal pastors in Alberta?” The structure of this thesis is based on an arts-informed research model. Collage is integrated with verbal dialogue to offer a dynamic expression of how perfectionism impacts the spiritual lives of Pentecostal pastors in Alberta. Art in the research process reflects the important role creativity plays in peoples' lives, and supplements fullness of expression. In addition, a portion of this work describes my personal journey with perfectionism and how it has impacted me spiritually.

Before embarking further, I am going to acknowledge the wisdom found in the words sung by Julie Andrews in *The Sound of Music*, “nothing comes from nothing, nothing ever could” (1965). This research topic began to take shape in my heart and my mind during one of the courses in my second year of Bible college. The purpose of the class was to forewarn students about the difficulties they could possibly face in vocational ministry. Practical information was shared about how to balance personal life with work, cope with stress, and prevent burnout. All of these are prominent areas in the lives of pastors.

While I knew before entering the class that ministry was not my desired career path, it developed in me an interest in supporting pastors and their families as they face ministry imbued difficulties. Though I have never been employed as a pastor, I have had exposure to different climates of ministry. During college, I spent hundreds of hours serving in churches and their local communities. Those experiences revealed some holistically taxing aspects of ministry, and helped me gain insight into the realities of

working in church. While I rejoice that many who enter ministry love their careers, I am saddened at the startling numbers (approximately 1600 each month) who feel overwhelmed, and choose to quit (Igniteus, n.d.). My concern regarding the toll of ministry is bolstered by a passion for the importance of the work that pastors do. Ultimately, my hope is to see a decline in the number of clergy leaving the church from stress related burnout. I am a firm believer that when pastors are healthy they will enjoy longevity in their careers.

It is my hope that this research may help decrease burnout caused by perfectionism as it impacts peoples' stress levels at work. Pastors suffering the stresses caused by perfectionism also face the incumbent stresses of ministry. This research was birthed from wondering whether the same perfectionism that causes stress could also have a spiritual impact. The spiritual life of a pastor is central to their well being. It is for those reasons that this work focuses on the potential connection between perfectionism and spirituality.

An additional desire for this research is that it would help de-stigmatize the expectation of perfection people may have towards clergy. In certain churches it is understood that pastors should have the freedom to express their struggles to others without penalization. Despite this increasing change, many pastors continue to feel unsafe with the idea of reaching out for assistance. The fear of judgement or risk of losing their employment often holds them back. This research helps demonstrate what can happen when the expectation of perfection is placed upon, or resides in, a pastor's life. My hope is that awareness will begin the process of advocating for and developing changes around certain philosophical, and practical expectations placed on pastors.

It is important to establish the biases that shape my beliefs around this topic. First, my experiences of perfectionism are unanimously negative and have developed the underpinnings of my opinions. I define perfectionism as a pervasive worldview that creates a desire for perfection and impacts all aspects of a person. The next bias I have is believing people are holistic, such that their emotional, mental, physical, relational, and spiritual selves are connected and interdependent. When one area of a person's life is influenced by an external source, the other areas will inevitably be impacted as well. This perspective comes through in the research when the participants are questioned about the impact of perfectionism on numerous areas of their lives and whether there is a resultant spiritual impact. Third, I value the depth of knowledge gained by personal experience. Fourth, I believe the process of creating art and the diversity of visual communication offer tacit knowledge in a way that is different from verbal dialogue. Fifth, my definition of a 'spiritual life' is the subjective sense a person has of the ethereal in their experience, it is tangible but cannot be fully described. I also believe 'the spiritual' is composed of individual elements that are combined with an overall sense of connecting to something greater. Sixth, I am a Christian who seeks to value and honour the diversity in experience of every individual. These aspects, and undoubtedly others, have informed my work as a researcher and the content within this thesis.

This work uses collage to look at the impact perfectionism has on the spiritual lives of clergy. The four participants in this research fulfill certain criteria, they are Pentecostal pastors in Alberta with personal experiences of perfectionism, who have worked a minimum of three years in full time ministry, and are married. The relatively small number of participants has made it difficult to ascertain general opinions on this

matter. However, both the research and my own experience give some insight into the exploration. It is my hope that this investigation will increase general knowledge behind the drivenness to attain impossible standards. The heartbeat of this research is that it be an informative, encouraging voice to all who face perfectionism in their lives.

## Literature Review

The research question, “How does perfectionism impact the spiritual lives of Pentecostal pastors in Alberta” serves as the guide for this literature review. The following information pertains to perfectionism, pastoral life issues, and some of the theological elements that reside in this research.

The first section is a general overview of how perfectionism is understood to affect peoples' lives. This overview touches on some of the psychological, emotional, relational, and physical influences associated with perfectionism. Following that, is a look into pastoral life issues that are experienced on an interdenominational basis. Literature specific to the life issues of Pentecostal pastors was minimal. This resulted in the use of data gathered from various denominational traditions.

### Perfectionism

When the researcher Ann W. Smith examined perfectionism she found that elements of it are present in the majority of people. Smith realized the average person has habitual patterns they rely upon when faced with life stressors. Habits are often formed to hide flaws, and/or excel, and predominantly occur in the unconscious (Smith, 1990). Smith shared that the “desire to be superhuman only becomes a problem when we begin to believe that perfectionism is actually possible- and even necessary- for self-esteem, peace of mind and acceptance by others” (Smith, 1990, p.2).

While the need for perfection is seen to be problematic, it is different than having high standards or desiring excellence (Smith, 1990). The difference is described in the book, *Perfectionism: What's Bad about Being Too Good?* by Miriam Adderholdt and Jan

Goldberg. When perfectionists do not achieve goals, they are negatively impacted emotionally and mentally (Adderholdt & Goldberg, 1999). Adderholdt and Goldberg state that individuals who depend on accomplishments for personal value, have an unrealistic understanding of self worth (1999). Someone who desires excellence rather than perfection understands self worth differently, the difference being that “people who pursue excellence enjoy their achievements and take pride in their accomplishments” (Adderholdt & Goldberg, 1999, p.18). Perfectionists do not allow themselves to celebrate what they have done. They continually strive for greater goals, and do not feel satisfied by their accomplishments.

Another difference is non-perfectionists who face failure recover sooner than perfectionists because they are more emotionally and cognitively flexible (Adderholdt & Goldberg, 1999). Perfectionists tend to dwell on negative experiences because of the significance those experiences hold for them. The perspectives of healthy strivers regarding the importance of goals are more balanced than for perfectionists (Adderholdt & Goldberg, 1999). Unfortunately the harmful behaviours of perfectionists are often reinforced when family, friends, and peers are excessively supportive of their achievements (Adderholdt & Goldberg, 1999). As perfectionists recurrently receive these subliminal messages, it can influence their understanding of self worth, causing perfectionistic habits and beliefs to deepen.

The book, *When Perfect Isn't Good Enough: Strategies for Coping With Perfectionism*, by Martin M. Antony and Richard P. Swinson, furthers the discussion about this topic. The authors understand perfectionism in terms of people who choose extreme goals that are impossible to attain (Antony & Swinson, 2009). When

perfectionists achieve goals with a positive outcome, they do not experience fulfillment because their standards for perfection were not met (Antony & Swinson, 2009).

Antony and Swinson use the work of Paul Hewitt and Gordon Flett, two Canadian psychologists who produced a multidimensional scale to classify different types of perfectionism. The first classification is self-oriented perfectionism, which is the expectation for one's self to be perfect (Antony & Swinson, 2009). The second is other-oriented perfectionism, which is the desire for others to live and accomplish tasks with perfection (Antony & Swinson, 2009). The third form is socially prescribed perfectionism, which is the need to be perfect for others (2009). Numerous studies have been conducted based on the work produced by Hewitt and Flett (Flett, Hewitt & Hallett, 1995; Wittenberg & Norcross, 2001; Mitchelson & Burns, 1998; Appleton et al., 2009; Hill et al., 2009; Hill et al., 2008; Stoeber et al., 2009; Chang & Sanna, 2001; Enns & Cox, 2002; Childs & Stoeber, 2010, etc.) that have found their categorization system to be effective.

Researchers have assessed whether stress levels vary amongst the three orientations of perfectionism. Childs & Stoeber (2010) found that “self-oriented and other-oriented perfectionism [are] associated with lower levels of burnout and higher levels of engagement... [rather than] socially prescribed perfectionism [which] showed the opposite pattern” (Childs & Stoeber, 2010, p. 15). For the purposes of their study, burnout was described as, cynicism and reduced efficacy towards work. Engagement was defined as vigour, dedication and absorption with work (Childs & Stoeber, 2010). Their research found socially prescribed perfectionism to have the highest burnout rate and the least amount of engagement. Yet non-perfectionists were found to experience less

burnout than all three categories of perfectionists, showing that perfectionists experience more work related stress than non-perfectionists (Jowett, Hill, Hall, & Curran, 2012).

This system categorizes perfectionism in terms of it being a negative influence in peoples' lives.

Another way of categorizing perfectionism is to divide it into adaptive perfectionism, and maladaptive perfectionism (Periasamy & Ashby, 2002). Those who have maladaptive perfectionism are overwhelmed by the ever present difference between their ideals and reality (Periasamy & Ashby, 2002). As a result, the individuals are prone to certain psychological disorders, such as depression (Frost, Benton, & Dowrick, 1990).

Adaptive perfectionists maintain high standards but have lower levels of stress (Periasamy & Ashby, 2002). They tend to deal with stress in healthier ways than those with maladaptive perfectionism (Rice & VanArsdale, 2010). Adaptive perfectionists were found to have the least amount of perceived stress in comparison to maladaptive perfectionists, and non-perfectionists (Rice & VanArsdale, 2010). A related study conducted with African American and Caucasian women, has found that maladaptive perfectionism is associated with stress, while adaptive perfectionism is not (Chang, Watkins, & Banks, 2004).

This brief background on perfectionism establishes the framework upon which perfectionism is discussed later in this thesis. The three categories of prescribed perfectionism are amalgamated with adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism to form the combined approach for this work.

## **Pastoral Life Issues**

Leading a church can be overwhelming to the point of causing burnout, health issues, and marital concerns. Statistics regarding ministry related stress in the United States indicate that up to 20% of clergy suffer from burn out due to stress (Igniteus, n.d.). Every month there are approximately 1,600 clergy who leave the church, indirectly causing 700 million dollars in replacement and transition costs (Igniteus, n.d.). These numbers indicate serious consequences connected to ministry related stress.

According to Weaver, Flannelly, Larson, Stapleton, and Koenig two spheres of influence are understood to be leading causes of stress (2002). The structures within the establishment of church, and pastors who hold themselves to too-high professional standards are lead contributors to stress (Weaver et al., 2002). When structures within churches lead to excessive work loads, minimal internal support, lengthy work hours, needy parishioners, and bureaucracy, they contribute to stress (Weaver et al., 2002). Some studies show the average amount a Methodist pastor works per week is 56. 2 hours (Weaver et al., 2002, p. 128). Some parishioners expect pastors to be able to lead 16 major tasks at one time, which is “a recipe for failure” (The Barna Group, 2009, par. 12).

Burnout in pastors can also be connected to upbringing. When parents are difficult to please, their child may transfer feelings of inadequacy to his/her relationship with God (Grosch & Olsen, 2000). The child grows to believe that he/she should continually work harder for Gods' approval (Grosch & Olsen, 2000).

Another stressful reality for clergy pertains to their salaries. Approximately 63% of pastors have Master's degrees, and make an annual salary of \$38, 214 (Hileman, 2008, p.121). Other Master degree holding professionals make \$77, 935 (Hileman, 2008,

p.121). On top of their relatively low incomes, the isolation of being in church leadership can add to the burden of ministry (Hileman, 2008). Most clergy are unable to trust others with their personal life experiences or struggles because of the likelihood they will be spread as gossip (Hileman, 2008). This forces them to face many of their hardships in virtual isolation (Hileman, 2008). Stress levels from working in a role that demands numerous skill sets, long hours, pays a minimal salary, and causes isolation, are only a portion of what pastors can experience (Hileman, 2008).

Ministry related stress also affects physical health. Leaders of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) have an obesity rate of over 50%, and part of the epidemic is that 75% of their leaders are at risk for poor nutrition (Zylstra, 2009). Health concerns of this kind are likely experienced by pastors who have no time, and/or no energy, for self care. ELCA clergy are half as likely as their parishioners to use alcohol and tobacco, but they are 10% more likely to experience high blood pressure, high blood sugar, high cholesterol, and to have difficulties with obesity (Zylstra, 2009). Though the above traits are not necessarily deadly, they indirectly contribute to myocardial infarctions, strokes, and diabetes, all of which can be fatal. These issues are believed to be prominent on an interdenominational basis (Zylstra, 2009). Zuccolo has found the life expectancy for clergy is shorter than the average, and they, clergy, tend to use more antidepressants (2010). Uld Lundberg's article, 'Stress Hormones in Health and Illness: The Roles of Work and Gender', shows there are dangers from long term exposure to stress hormones; epinephrine, norepinephrine, and cortisol (2005). Excessive exposure to catecholamines (epinephrine and norepinephrine) are linked to high blood pressure, heart attacks, and strokes (Lundberg, 2005). Extended exposure to cortisol is known to lead to

heart disease, diabetes, immunity deficiency, and changes in cerebral functioning (Lundberg, 2005). Lundberg notes that a lack of time for physical rest will contribute to an increase in these symptoms (2005). This data can indicate critical consequences from stress in ministry.

Pastors are not the only ones negatively impacted by the often stressful life style of ministry. Sadly, a high percentage of spouses begin by loving the church, and end up hating it (Daniel, 2009). Clerical marriages are more public than most which tends to increase the amount of stress experienced by the couple. In an article by Wendy Murray Zoba, she shares from her experience that congregants do not realize church is isolating for pastors' spouses (1997). Spouses are lonely because there is a limited number of people they can trust, they feel pressured to worship a certain way, their level of church involvement is judged, and they have to display a certain persona (Daniel, 2009). Church is not a place where pastors' spouses can relax and commune in the same way as congregants. The therapist Ron Wachs confesses "clergy wives are the angriest people he sees" (Hileman, 2008, p. 124).

The stress of being an ideal Christian can also diminish a spouse's sense of identity, causing him/her to lose freedom of expression (Murphy-Geiss, 2009). Spouses will often adapt by becoming reclusive. Some of the findings of the United Methodist Church offer a revealing insight into the lives of pastors' spouses. The following excerpt reflects the expectations felt by one overwhelmed pastor's wife who felt the need:

To be present at everything, always to smile and nod [her] head in agreement and never express an opinion different from the prevailing one, to have a spotless house and always be ready (with

no notice) to invite in anyone from the church who wants to drop by unannounced (though it may be interrupting dinner or plans for which [they] are getting ready to leave), to send out birthday and anniversary cards to everyone in the church, to get Christmas cards out to everyone in the church within a week of Thanksgiving, to accept broken appliances and inadequate electrical service at the parsonage because, 'It was good enough for the people who were here before [her]. [She is] going to be a complainer, [they] can tell!' (Murphy-Geiss, 2009, n. p.)

Of almost 1000 participants, this lady was one of 305 spouses who reported having excessive expectations at church. There were 185 who felt a significant amount of expectations, but were not overwhelmed. Around 250 saw themselves with the same number of expectations as average church members, but had to work at maintaining boundaries. Some participants reported having no expectations because they consciously chose to ignore them (Murphy-Geiss, 2009).

Another difficult reality of ministry is the impact it can have on intimacy in clerical marriages. For a number of reasons, openness within the couples' relationship will often break down as a result of non-communicated stress. One example is when the clergy's spouse chooses not to discuss his/her personal difficulties to avoid adding to the pastor's burdens (Hileman, 2008). The decline in communication between spouses regarding ministry and other hurdles in life can lead to a lack of connection in their relationship. Issues such as "sexual misconduct, extra marital affairs, and addiction to

internet pornography have become a troubling reality in the lives of many clergy” (Hileman, 2008, p. 138). The discovery of a breach in fidelity will often end in divorce, and can lead to termination of the pastor's employment in some denominations.

Added to marital issues are the expectations placed on pastors' children. Sometimes called pastor's kids, or PK's, the children grow up knowing their family holds a unique place in the church community. Much like the pastor's spouse, his/her children are expected to live up to the standards of ideal Christian etiquette (Hileman, 2008). Some pastors' spouses feel they and their children are “expected to be perfect” (Murphy-Geiss, 2009, p. 10). Assumptions are sometimes made about the children's choices. This is certainly applicable in the teenage years when the pastor's child is expected to attend the church's youth group (Hileman, 2008).

Children can feel second in importance to the church, especially when their family has to cancel special occasions in order to go to a parishioner's party or celebration (Hileman, 2008). The entire clerical family has an extra sense of responsibility at social church gatherings (Hileman, 2008). The roles associated with their titles do not leave when they are away from a formal church setting (Hileman, 2008). What these sources show is that it is not only the pastor facing the demands of ministry, but his/her entire family as well.

Another stress that can exist in ministry comes from church boards with the power to end a pastor's contract. This creates incredible instability for the pastor because of the possibility of having to move to another city, province, or even country. Many live with the knowledge that, “they are only a congregational vote away from moving” (Hileman, 2008, p. 125). This leaves little room for honesty, or close friendships, because

saying something offensive could ultimately put the pastor's job in jeopardy. These issues circulate back to the issue of isolation caused by the inability to be authentic in church.

Moving can disrupt family routines, relationships, and a sense of identity (Hileman, 2008). For some pastors this disruption happens every two or three years, for others, it is closer to four or five years (Hileman, 2008). Once a family has moved, the transition period into a new church can take a year or two (Hileman, 2008). Often, congregations are still emotionally and mentally attached to the previous pastor and do not feel ready, or willing, to embrace the new family (Hileman, 2008). While the difficulties of moving could be expounded upon, the foremost message here is that change and loss can happen frequently in clergy families.

Hileman, feels that therapists who work with clergy must “establish a sense of trust by listening to their unique experience and validating their emotions” (2008, p. 136). My hope is that this research will encourage pastors affected by perfectionism to seek out supportive environments in which they can communicate openly. When Pastor Nick Monsma was only a year into ministry, he said that his pastoral support group was valuable because he had, “the ability to share experiences and hear the wisdom of the other pastors” (Boehm, 2011, par. 7). Groups can also help curb the isolation that many ministry leaders feel. Rev. Delleman of Ponoka, Alberta said that his, “involvement in a peer group eased [the] sense of aloneness greatly” (Boehm, 2011, par. 8).

One of the reasons I have chosen this area to research is my firm belief that healthy church leadership invokes healthy congregations. Healthy churches are often reflected in communities through such things as after school programs, opportunities for volunteering, lower deviancy rates, and the promotion of sports and social programs

(Lewis, 2008). Churches are not only a place for people to become a part of a supportive community, but also offer opportunities to develop new skills and interests in life. These positive qualities show the numerous benefits of church, but churches have difficulty functioning without well rounded leaders. When leaders are not holistically healthy, they cannot lead effectively long term. When pastors are not healthy the positive influence of their churches in their surrounding communities can be depleted.

This lengthy list of stressful difficulties that are sometimes present in the lives of clergy and their families is certainly worrying. The multi-level ripples that emanate from the effect of stress on pastors is evident. Pastors who bear these burdens, in addition to stress caused by certain forms of perfectionism, are carrying an incredible load.

## Methodology

The methodology used for this research is arts-informed, one of numerous qualitative approaches. Arts-informed research creates a meeting point of creativity, physicality, cognitions, intuitions, and spirituality. This style of inquiry was chosen instead of a quantitative methodology because of the subjective experience of creativity.

One of the fathers of psychology, Wilhelm Wundt, shared that quantitative and qualitative research perspectives were based on simple and complex processes in psychology (Benjafield, 2002). The former finds results using stimuli in a controlled environment. The latter looks at human psychology within the environment in which it occurs on a daily basis (Benjafield, 2002). A way of seeing quantitative and qualitative research is “the two realities connect, they overlap, they merge, but they are recognizably different” (Stake, 2010, p.28). Aspects of both quantitative and qualitative inquiry are present in every research process, but this work is predominantly qualitative.

In support of arts based inquiry Rubin thinks, “creating visual imagery is far more effective than anything a person might say” (2010, p. 168). Arts-informed research offers the freedom to explore “the dimensions beyond reason, beyond written and spoken words” (Eleniak, 2008, p.8). This qualitative model allowed for collage to be used as a way for the participants to express their experiences.

The structure this work is built on is found in the directives of Ardra L. Cole and J. Gary Knowles, in their, *Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research: Perspectives, Methodologies, Examples and Issues*. To begin with, arts-informed research aims to bring

an “explicit challenge to logical positivism and technical rationality as the only acceptable guides to explaining human behaviour and understanding” (Cole & Knowles, 2008, p. 59). The aim of this methodology is to gain a holistic comprehension of the research topic and expand the definition of purposeful knowledge to include both subjective and temporary information.

In addition to the philosophical purposes for arts-informed research, Knowles and Cole have written seven foundational principles for it (2008). These include, commitment to one particular art form, the maintenance of methodological integrity, a creative inquiry process, the subjective presence of the researcher, the primary focus of the work is on subjects beyond the researcher, the content impacts the greater community, and the art in the research is meant to further other areas of knowledge (2008). I now share how these principles are integrated in this work.

Firstly, the one art form that is used in this research process is collage.

Secondly, methodological integrity is supported through the tangible reason of collage being a creative way for gaining information about the impact of perfectionism on spiritual health. Since this is the main focus of the research, it substantiates the use of collage. Collage was particularly useful in this inquiry because, “the ambiguity that remains present... [provides] a way [for] expressing the said and the unsaid” (Knowles & Cole, 2008, p. 268). The conscious and unconscious are integrated into the art-response, giving depth to the research.

Collage is also valuable because it is simple and well known, making it more approachable than many other art forms. For people with limited confidence, the idea of

making art can be intimidating. Butler-Kisber and Peldma describe collage to be the “process of using fragments of found images or materials and gluing them to a flat surface” (2010, n.p.). Collage is comfortable because it does not require elite artistic abilities.

Thirdly, flexibility and creativity are required in the research process. Flexibility is integrated into this inquiry with open ended questions in the interviews (see appendices 1 and 2) that give the participants the opportunity to respond freely. Creativity is integrated as part of the process through art making.

The fourth principle states the researcher should academically express themselves in the work. I have chosen to do this by expressing some of my personal experiences with perfectionism. Poetry, diary reflections, reflective writing, and art (see Appendix 7) are part of my sharing. I have also included my personal interactions with some of the participants’ responses. These modes of communication offer my voice in supplementation to the experiences of the participants.

The fifth principle outlines that the research must not only pertain to the researcher. The focal point of this research is to gain a better understanding of how perfectionism affects the spiritual lives of Pentecostal pastors in Alberta. Participation from the pastors has been foundational and pivotal.

The sixth and seventh principles of arts-informed research are, the findings should be applicable to more than intellectuals, and should expand other areas of knowledge. Arts-informed research is meant to “embrace the potential of the arts to inform scholarship” (Knowles & Cole, 2008, p. 62). This research fulfills these requirements by

gaining information that is applicable to people who work in churches, counsel pastors and their families, who desire to become pastors, and for those who struggle with perfectionism.

### **The Process**

After receiving approval for both the research and ethics proposals, the first step was to mail participation information letters to churches in Alberta. The Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada website was very useful for finding the contact information I needed. After the letters were mailed out, I called the churches to ask the pastors if they had received them. Most often the pastors were not available to speak with. Overall the letters did not prove very successful as a method for gaining participants. I then decided to approach the pastors using a more direct route. Many churches have pastoral contact information on their web sites, which made it possible to contact the pastors by e-mail.

Pastors who were interested responded. We then set up a time to talk on the phone and discuss details regarding the research. Some did not desire to talk on the phone and preferred to immediately establish a time for the first interview. For those who wished to talk prior to the first meeting, we had a phone call that lasted approximately fifteen minutes. The main purpose for the call was to answer any questions the clergy had. If the pastor was willing to participate, we decided upon a time and meeting place for the first interview.

The advantage of having the research interviews occur on a one-to-one basis was that the participants could choose where the interviews would take place. The options

included meeting at either his/her office, or in a room at St. Stephen's College. This allowed flexibility regarding comfort levels, availability to travel, and time restrictions.

Each pastor in this research fulfills the necessary criteria for participation. They have all been working as Pentecostal pastors in Alberta for a minimum of three years, are married, and have personal experience with perfectionism. Three of the pastors are male, and one is female. As was mentioned, the names of the participants have been changed to protect their identity and assure confidentiality.

At the beginning of the first interview each participant and I discussed and signed a consent form. The only prominent ethical issue identified in this research was regarding protection of the participants' identities. This was dealt with by having each participant choose a pseudonym to protect their identity. Once those steps were completed we proceeded with the interview questions and collage.

Most of the questions focus on topics that, in Christendom, are specific expressions of spirituality such as prayer or worship. Some questions are broader, and pertain to the overall relationship between the participant and God. The participants were asked if the influence of perfectionism has been positive, neutral (no effect), or negative for their spiritual lives. Asking this question helped the participant focus on the specific impact perfectionism has had on their spiritual lives.

The questions in the first interview:

1. How do you see your current relationship with God?
2. How do you imagine God 'sees' you?
3. Has perfectionism impacted your prayer life?

4. Has perfectionism impacted how you read or apply the Bible to your life?
5. Has perfectionism impacted your desire for community with other Christians?
6. Has perfectionism impacted your desire to serve in the church?
7. Has perfectionism impacted your experience of solitude?
8. Has perfectionism impacted your family life, specifically your marriage relationship?
9. Has perfectionism impacted your experience of worship; corporate or private?
10. Has perfectionism impacted your experience, or acceptance of grace?
11. Are there any other ways perfectionism has impacted you that have not yet been discussed?
12. Has perfectionism ever served you well in your relationship with God? If so, how?
13. Has perfectionism ever been a detriment to your spiritual life? If so, how?
14. Does perfectionism eat away at your spiritual life?

The two questions for the second interview that are listed below did not bring significant changes to the research. For this reason I am simply going to summarize those responses. For question number one all responded with a “no” and for question number two, the participants all indicated that this process has given them another perspective in regards to their experiences. One participant said that being a part of this research has been an “interesting experience.” Another was surprised by how far they had come in their journey of perfectionism, while yet another shared that the process highlighted the large role spirituality holds for them. The remaining participant felt the process made a positive difference in regards to how they now understand their spiritual life.

The questions in the second interview:

1. Have there been any thoughts, stories, or significant pieces of information since the first interview that you would like to share?
2. Has this process impacted how you look at your spiritual life?

Participants were also asked to identify the positive, neutral, or negative impact that perfectionism has on their spiritual lives in each of the areas covered in the research questions.

After each question the participants spent time finding images or words that represented their response. Some participants would explain the meaning of their collage as they made it, others were mostly silent until they completed the collage. For the participants who were quieter during the questioning and collage making portion, we ended their interviews by discussing the meaning of their collages. Photos of the collage were then taken and stored on my computer.

To help maintain accuracy, each interview was audio recorded and transcribed. The transcript was then typed out within a day or two of the interview. This helped minimize the time lapse between the interview and transcription process, which enabled me to remember body language. In applicable situations, side notes describing non-verbal communication were written in the transcript. These helped me recall the intended meanings of certain answers.

Once the transcript was complete, I wrote out clarification questions regarding the answers received in the first interview and asked these at the beginning of the second interview. Participants were then asked the list of questions developed for the second

interview (see appendix 2). At the conclusion of the second interview the collage was given to the participant to keep.

A second transcript was made after the second interview. Using both transcripts I wrote out a summary that included content from both interviews. A rough draft of the summary was sent to the participant in order for him/her to assess the message it conveyed. After receiving approval for the summary I revised and edited each one.

Due to extraneous circumstances one participant (Elvis) was unable to meet for the second interview. In order to work around this, I wrote out short summaries for each answer he gave in the first interview. The purpose for the short summaries was to ensure that my understandings of Elvis' answers were as accurate as possible. Elvis then read the summaries adding clarification for accuracy. The clarifications were incorporated into a longer summary which he then read and approved.

All participants indicated that the process was helpful in numerous ways. It opened their awareness in regards to how perfectionism operates in their lives. It allowed them to view their relationship with God and their ministry through different eyes. While all participants were impacted differently by the process, they all found it to be of value.

## Findings

It is important to note this research uses a holistic framework. When one area in a person's life is impacted by any kind of change, it inadvertently affects other areas. That premise shapes the questions in the interviews.

The following interviews are ordered chronologically. In these summaries a combination of direct quotes and paraphrased sections are used to communicate the meanings of the responses given during the interviews. The English written in the direct quotes maintain the grammar used by the participants in the interviews. The paraphrased portions are meant to minimize the amount of space needed to share the participants' experiences.

### Frank



*Figure 1.* Frank's collage.



*Figure 2.* Man resting on mountain.

1. How do you see your current relationship with God?

In order to depict his relationship with God, Frank chose an image of a man resting on a mountain trail. Frank describes his relationship with God as being secure because he is able to rest and lean on God in his life. The closeness in their relationship is comparable to an infant leaning on their parent's knee.

Frank shares that he feels the freedom to explore and participate in life in any way that he chooses. In their relationship God does not force him or use guilt to manipulate him into making decisions. While God cares about his choices, God is not foreboding or controlling. Frank chooses his own path even when that sometimes takes him away from God. Frank senses God's disapproval when he does something outside of the will of God. This sense of disapproval is not the same as facing anger or being controlled. Frank has an ever present accountability partner in God, who does not shame or condemn.

Frank feels that perfectionism impacts whether or not he follows God's will. This is because perfectionism creates unrealistic ideals in his mind that are disguised as God's promptings. Thankfully, even when he endeavours to pursue goals that are based in perfectionism, God transforms his motivations. He describes this as being

when you start something without the best intentions, but you finish off with a refined intention... the whole journey changes you. You look back, and you're like, oh my gosh, I started out with such a shallow [perfectionistic] reason, but it ended with something so much better and deeper than what it started with.

In that specific way, Frank sees how perfectionism has the potential to be positive for his spiritual life. The overall sense Frank has about perfectionism in this area is that it does not have any impact on how he sees his relationship with God. He, therefore, feels that his spiritual life is neutrally impacted.

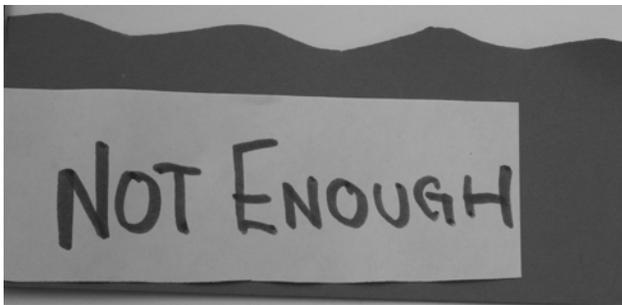


*Figure 3.* Boy wearing headdress.

2. How do you imagine God sees you?

Frank feels that God sees him like a child who is still growing and developing into an adult. In the image, this is represented by the head dress the boy will eventually grow into. Frank appears to value being 'child-like' because there are certain qualities this renders in a person, such as humility and flexibility. Frank then shared that sometimes being child-like has negatives aspects. He occasionally feels inadequate and insecure, which can prompt him to question whether he is taken seriously by others.

Imagining that God sees him as child-like has been both neutral and positive for his spiritual life. It is neutral because perfectionism does not impact this part of his identity and it is positive because he likes that God sees him in this way.



*Figure 4.* Experience of prayer.

### 3. Has perfectionism impacted your prayer life?

Frank's response was intriguing because as he answered this question, he appeared to come to a new realization. The original response he gave was that he felt he did not pray enough. The orange/red background in the image represents the potential amount he could be praying. The white piece of paper with 'not enough' written on it shows how much he currently prays.

Certain influences have planted expectations in his mind regarding the length and frequency of adequate prayer. During his ordination he encountered standards for the amount of time (in minutes) he was expected to pray on a weekly basis. Another major

influence came from growing up in a community where others would regularly pray for two hours before church. On a sub-conscious level, these influences have become his standards for prayer, and he feels he falls short of them on a perpetual basis.

After sharing those experiences Frank said,

I just realized... my fallacy in this whole topic because yes [perfectionism] does affect me. I see these outcomes, these ideals, I think when I pray I should reach this emotional, ecstatic revelation or something profound where you finish praying and you're changed. Because that's essentially what we communicate on the stage [at church]... Whereas, the fallacy for me that I realize, because I love reading Henry Nouwen, Jean Vanier... Everything I read of theirs, it's like their books are so short and some of their prayers are so short. But I was impacted by one of their books, and it's not a long book, but there's so much substance in that short amount of time, and then I'm like, why is my metrics time?

He realized that his pre-established standards for prayer are not indicative of quality. Rather than focusing on external metrics, he feels it is more important to be true to the process. Prayer requires the freedom to adapt with the different situations and contexts of life. What works at one time does not necessarily fit all the time.

Perfectionism takes away freedom in prayer because external metrics are seen to be more important than they actually are. Frank feels the impact perfectionism has had on his prayer life has been spiritually negative.



*Figure 5.* Distant mountain.

4. Has perfectionism impacted how you read or apply the Bible to your life?

To Frank this question asks, “How often do you apply what you read in the Bible to your life?” The image of a far off mountain connects with him because it indicates where he could be in the future. Likewise, he feels the amount the Bible is applied to his life is not what it could be. This sense of not measuring up to his expectations is counterbalanced by grace. His view is “There's still another day to try out this virtue, or this command” and there is no immediate need for it to happen all at once.

Frank also feels there are times when perfectionism creates a desire within him to know for certain the real truth, or the perfect truth of the Bible. Finding that certainty can be difficult and in his experience those times are minimal. For the most part, reading the Bible is an adventure of discovering more about God's interactions with the world. The impact of perfectionism on his Bible reading is neutral in his spiritual life.



*Figure 6. Man in a bubble.*

5. Has perfectionism impacted your desire for community with other Christians?

The bubble over the man's head in this picture symbolizes Frank because when he is in church on Sundays, he operates primarily on a cerebral level. This is due to the line up of people who want to talk with him every week. In this setting, there is no way to engage in deeply meaningful conversation. When this happens, Frank does not connect with others in a way that reflects his entire identity. Isolation and distance accumulate as a result of responding to others with only a portion of who he is.

Perfectionism fits into this because it causes Frank to “portray someone [else's] ideal of how [he] should respond, or who they would like [him] to be.” When Frank responds cerebrally to someone, it is not only out of his need to accommodate them, but also to fulfill what he thinks their expectations are for him. When he responds how others want, rather than how he genuinely wants to, it feels like he is selling himself short. Perfectionism has a negative impact on Frank's desire for community with other Christians which in turn is negative for his spiritual life.

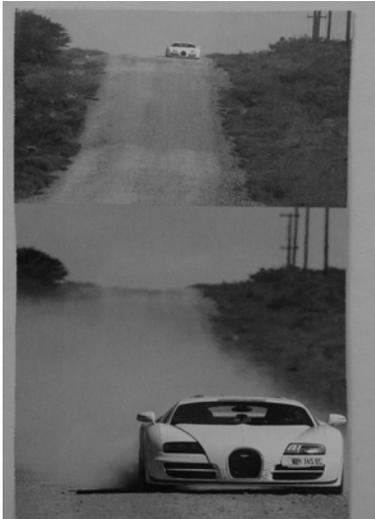


*Figure 7.* Open cupboard door.

6. Has perfectionism impacted your desire to serve in the church?

The image of the cabinet represents Frank's desire to simplify and organize. This occurs when aspects of ministry are not happening according to plan. While simplifying and organizing can be helpful in chaotic situations, for him, it is connected to perfectionism, and is an issue around control. When “things aren't going to go the way [he would] like them to go, then [he wants to] figure out a way to control the situation.”

Perfectionism resides in his standards for how he wants “things... to go”. When his standards are not met, he feels a strong need to control the situation so they can be achieved. When he cannot control a chaotic situation he tends to be critical of what others are doing. On a certain level, he feels his standards and approaches are the only ones that are acceptable. Based on these experiences, perfectionism has a negative impact on Frank’s desire to serve in the church, which is also negative for his spiritual life.



*Figure 8. Two cars.*

7. Has perfectionism impacted your experience of solitude?

The car at the top of the image is stopped and the one at the bottom is in motion. The top car represents a state of solitude while the bottom car indicates activity. Frank desires solitude because he is, “energized from [it] but... there's always things that need to be done.” As a result, Frank identifies more frequently with the bottom car.

Because of his perfectionism Frank finds it difficult to spend time in solitude. The need to finish tasks is partly connected to Frank’s desire to fulfill other peoples' expectations of him. When this happens, he equates his “role [as a pastor] with [a] performance.”

Part of Frank’s need to fulfill the expectations of others comes from his belief that historically Pastors have an established legacy of always being willing to respond to

numerous demands. Spending time in solitude appears to be contradictory to that legacy. For Frank, this creates tension because

when [he is] not doing something, yeah, it feels like [he is] not doing [his] job, or [he is] not accomplishing what [he] should be accomplishing. So yeah, there's always that drive... [He] should be moving forward... always moving forward... that's the direction of perfectionism.

The tendency to continuously be moving is unhelpful in the long term because it distracts Frank from having to deal with some of the struggles that are in his heart. He finds that solitude offers him the space and time to work on the difficulties that tend to go unchecked when he is busy. This has a negative impact on Frank's experience of solitude and his spiritual life.



*Figure 9.* Working in the yard.

8. Has perfectionism impacted your family life, specifically your marriage relationship?

In this image Frank is symbolized by the woman who is seen working, and his wife is represented by the man who is carrying away tools. When Frank's wife finishes a

job, he will say “No, no, no there's something else you need to do.” Although Frank does this with good intentions, it often creates negative tension. Thankfully these situations have a positive element, which is that after they occur, Frank seeks God in prayer.

Frank, because of his perfectionism, desires to see certain standards of behaviour in his wife when they are in public. He will unconsciously communicate through non-verbals that he disapproves of his wife's behaviour or input. Frank acknowledges that his wife is not doing anything wrong, they merely have different standards and approaches. When perfectionism touches Frank's marriage it negatively impacts his spiritual life. Perfectionism influences “everything... life is gloomy, everything is just turbulent.”

The way perfectionism impacts his marriage is similar to how it impacts his relationship with God. Perfectionism makes it seem as though God continually wants Frank to do more. In their relationship, perfectionism “almost flips the script... with [Frank] hearing God [say], ‘Frank, you should do this, you should do that,’ like how [he is] with [his] wife.” In those instances of misinterpretation, Frank, through his perfectionism sees a foreboding God.

Frank feels, again due to his perfectionism, that he is not living up to God's standards. This causes him to frequently ask, “Have I done this right?” The result is that “instead of a resting mountain, [God is] like this foreboding, 'hovering over [him]' kind of mountain.” In Frank's opinion, motivation is an underlying root of perfectionism because people think it is God's expectation for them to be perfect, “when really, maybe that isn't” what God is looking for.

Frank and I then discussed that the idea of perfection is not a hard truth. We see it as an elusive and ever changing target. There is always another step, addition, or change, that can help something be more perfect. The idea of something, or someone being perfect is based entirely on a subjective understanding. The illusion perfectionists have is they believe once they achieve a goal, they will be satisfied. However, when they achieve their goals, life is still not as perfect as they want it to be. They then tend to respond by finding other goals to reach, and the cycle continues.

Perfectionism has been problematic for Frank's marriage, the result of which has been negative for his spiritual life.



*Figure 10.* Hospitalized baby.

9. Has perfectionism impacted your experience of worship; corporate or private?

Frank is like the woman in the image and worship is like the baby. The similarities are in the ways that he often analyzes, and tries to fix worship. Corporate praise on Sunday mornings has certain struggles that are impacted by perfectionism. One difficulty is the lyrics of the songs they sing. The songs often concentrate on the individual, rather than the church as a whole. In addition, some of the lyrics do not hold

substantial meaning, and therefore are not engaging. These issues pull Frank away from embracing worship, and push him to dissect it. The overall result is that Frank no longer engages during worship at church.

In addition to the aforementioned difficulties, Frank finds that he does not engage with worship because of his role as a pastor. This is primarily due to the fact that he is required to address the congregation immediately after the worship service. While this is difficult for him on Sundays, he notes that even when he does not have any responsibilities at charismatic services, he is unable to engage.

Frank connects better at prayer stations in Anglican churches. However, even in this different context perfectionism does not leave completely. When he is at the prayer stations he sometimes spends his time wondering if he is 'doing it right,' which takes away from him being able to connect. While this is not ideal, it is less cumbersome than worship at his own church.

The form of worship that is free of perfectionism for Frank is listening to praise music, on his own, in the language he grew up speaking. However, the majority of Frank's exposure is to corporate worship in his evangelically based church, which does not nourish him. The overall impact of perfectionism on his experience of corporate worship is negative. Perfectionism does not influence his experience of private worship in his birth language, which he finds positive. The overall impact of perfectionism on Frank's experience of worship is negative for his spiritual life.



*Figure 11. A fish.*

10. Has perfectionism impacted your experience, or acceptance of grace?

Frank's experience of grace is reflected in the image because he feels like the little boy whose father is offering him a gift. The little boy appears to be balancing on a stool that is possibly wobbly. This gives the sense that the little boy is moving back and forth from the father. The father is saying "This is grace, I want to give this to you," and the boy responds by saying, "I don't know" indicating that he has difficulty deciding whether to accept it or not.

There are occasions when perfectionism makes it difficult for Frank to accept grace because he feels the continual need to earn what he is given and grace seems "too good." Perfectionism has impacted Frank's experience of grace in "a big time negative" way and this is negative for his spiritual life.



*Figure 12.* Women and children.

11. Are there any other ways perfectionism has impacted you that have not yet been discussed?

Frank chose to speak about his role in human rights. Frank feels that in his position as a pastor, he should be standing up for people who live in less fortunate circumstances. He desires to actively advocate for help where help is needed, both on local and international levels.

To Frank, the woman in the image who is looking straight into the camera seems to be asking, “When are you going to do something?” Frank wants to help, and is deeply moved by the inequality and suffering that he sees. However, perfectionism holds him back from moving forward because he has certain goals he wants to achieve as a humanitarian. The fear of not attaining his standards is paralyzing and stops him from moving forward. First, perfectionism holds him back with fear, and then, it amplifies the

guilt he experiences with regards to feeling as though he is not doing enough. The way perfectionism is pulling him in two directions has a negative impact on his spiritual life.



*Figure 13. Race car.*

At the end of the interview I repeated the question, “Are there any other ways perfectionism has impacted you that have not yet been discussed?” Frank found another image to share. Frank used an image of a race car to discuss some of the flaws of perfectionism. Frank thinks perfectionism is negative because it focuses on performance and on one’s self. Perfectionism not only draws attention to the individual, but can also create isolation.

Frank thinks perfectionists deal with their insecurities by overcompensating for them. The hope is, if the insecurities are hidden, others will not realize they exist. Unfortunately, overcompensation does not deal with insecurities, it only hides them.

Another layer for Frank is, sometimes rather than push himself to cover over his insecurities he will,

give up, and say, [he is] done, [he is] not going to do that, [he is] not going to try... [He does not] know how many times [he has] wanted to... 'leave the ministry'. Consistently there are always these periods, and if [he] boiled it down, it's because [he is] not this ideal [pastor], so [he would] rather just forget about it. Because [he sees] all these other pastors doing this, and doing that, and accomplishing this... and there's this certain mould, that [he is] like, 'I'm not that mould', and [he does not] ever want to be that. But, if [he] can't be that, maybe [he] shouldn't be a pastor... because... [he is] too flawed to be a pastor.

The selfishness, isolation, and insecurities that perfectionism amplifies in his life have a negative impact on Frank's spiritual life.



*Figure 14.* Potential versus failure.

12. Has perfectionism ever served you well in your relationship with God? If so, how?

Frank starts his response by saying that perfectionism is positive when God takes his perfectionistic motivations and makes them healthy. This process is not only positive for his spiritual life, but can also reveal new attributes within Frank's life. The second positive aspect of perfectionism is that God can take situations that are below Frank's

perfectionistic standards, and use them for good. What Frank means is, with “God's potential... even if you fail, God can use it for good.” The third piece he shares is, perfectionism “gives [him] something to strive for.” The ability to stop “wallowing” is valuable to Frank because he feels that many people get stuck in uninspiring mind frames.

Frank then buffers these positive comments by saying,

God is able to redeem [perfectionistic motivations], so in that way, yes [it is positive]. In a negative way, no, because as much as [he is] going forward, [he is] actually not going anywhere if [he keeps] pursuing perfection. Because it is sacrificing, it is selling [his] soul to something, an ideal that is really about [him], and [he] think[s] that part of perfectionism is very selfish to the core.

Frank describes this dichotomy as wanting to have a perfect life at the same time as not wanting one. Frank expands on this by pointing to the words 'potential' and 'failure' (in the image). He fears failure, but is drawn to people who have 'failed' in the eyes of society. Frank is comfortable with people who are not polished and do not come across as being perfect. Frank feels a greater sense of ease with people who are real, than with those who cover up their faults.

Despite feeling this way, Frank still finds himself drawn to the exemplary lives of well respected pastors and leaders within Christendom. He desires to emulate them because they appear to possess many positive qualities and to have successful ministries. The struggle for Frank is that he sees a disconnect between having that kind of success and still being real enough to admit failures. He feels “on the one hand [he] connect[s] with people [who] aren't perfect, but yet, [he longs] to be the one who is perfect.” The

tension between the two spheres illuminates the kind of dance that often occurs between peoples' ideals and their realities in perfectionism.

Frank highlighted the person Jesus was when He lived on earth. For Frank, "Jesus... is the ideal, we say He is perfect, but that's not what draws me to Christ, it's not His perfection." In terms of the pressure to live up to societal standards, "He broke all the cultural taboos, [and] social taboos that said that He wasn't the Messiah. He did the opposite of what people thought he would do, and yet, He loved people for their mess." Frank thinks Jesus' choice to intentionally be involved with peoples' struggles, and in essence, their imperfections, makes Him amazing,

Frank also shared his thoughts that, churches can be structured in impersonal ways that perpetuate false exteriors. An example is the difference between preaching to a crowd, and talking one on one. Sermons are practiced so the pastor is able to show a polished image of themselves to the congregation, allowing them to maintain the illusion of perfection. One-on-one interactions with congregants risk exposing the blemishes and imperfections of pastors. Fear of having one's image of perfection disappear can be a detriment to allowing closeness in relationships, which then results in isolation. Although people enjoy the idea of being a relational pastor, they

don't want that, [they] want the crowds, it's very impersonal... what [he is] saying [is], perfectionism in a lot of ways is very impersonal and it's about distance.

Because once you get into people's lives, [and] into the mess, then whatever notion of perfection that you wanted to create, it's gone.

Frank's response to this question begins by touching on some of the spiritually positive impacts of perfectionism and ends by discussing some of the negative aspects.



*Figure 15. Sailing.*

13. Has perfectionism ever been a detriment to your spiritual life? If so, how?

This image represents two issues that Frank faces in connection to perfectionism.

The first is that Frank sees himself like the sailor who wants to find a way past the ice blocking his path, but is unable to. In Frank's life, perfectionism creates a certain amount of internal drive that fuels him to pursue goals without relying on God. From his experiences, the energy perfectionism supplies him gets depleted over time, and eventually, Frank runs out of motivation to continue.

The second difficulty is that the goals Frank desires to achieve are based on unrealistic perfectionistic standards. Frank's ideal is to be an exemplary pastor, like the famous pastors who are seen "doing something right" in ministry. The excessive goals perfectionism creates, and the relatively short term motivation it provides have been negative influences in Frank's spiritual life.

14. Does perfectionism eat away at your spiritual life?

Frank did not choose an image for this question. Frank believes perfectionism causes people to put their energy towards achieving surface level ideals. The energy people expend pursuing those goals takes away from what is important in the long term. To Frank, what truly matters in life is the quality of relationships people have with their families, and whether a person knows that they have lived a life of integrity. Overall, he feels that perfectionism often works as a subtle influence that is detrimental in the long term.

### Elvis

Before sharing Elvis' responses, it is important to note that his experience of being a participant happened in a slightly different manner than with the others because we were unable to do the second interview in person. The questions for the second interview were sent to him, and he responded to them.



Figure 16. Elvis' collage.



*Figure 17. Waterfall.*

1. How do you see your current relationship with God?

Elvis chose this image because he has a comfortable relationship with God in which there is warmth and mutual love. He “really enjoy[s] [his] relationship with, and [his] friendship with God” and does not sense that God is condemning, controlling, or dominating. When God encourages him to go in certain directions in his life, it is not forceful. Overall Elvis does not feel that perfectionism has impacted how he sees his relationship with God, nor has it impacted his spiritual life.



*Figure 18. Temple.*

2. How do you imagine God 'sees' you?

Elvis feels that God delights in him and loves him on a deep level. Elvis compares himself to the temple in the picture, because like the temple, he has purpose. The temple was designed as a centre for community and worship. Today the temple remains a place where people can witness the beauty of its architecture and design. God's design for Elvis' life is to positively impact others, and the world, for Christ. Elvis does not do this out of obligation, but rather, it stems from the love in their relationship. Overall, Elvis senses that God sees him as a lovely person with a defined purpose. Perfectionism does not impact how Elvis envisions God seeing him.



*Figure 19.* The pyramids.

3. Has perfectionism impacted your prayer life?

The beautiful pyramids caught Elvis' attention. He knows it took incredible amounts of organization and structure to build them. This reflects, for Elvis how perfectionism has systematized his prayer life, making it regular but inflexible.

Elvis feels that having more freedom in prayer could allow him to explore his relationship with God. Rigidity in his prayer life ultimately takes away from the openness he has to hearing God's voice. He has found that “perfectionism is a good starter, but not a good sustainer”. By this he means perfectionism draws him to pray, but does not necessarily translate into depth, or quality of prayer. Elvis has found the impact of perfectionism on his prayer life to be negative, and to be negative for his spiritual life.

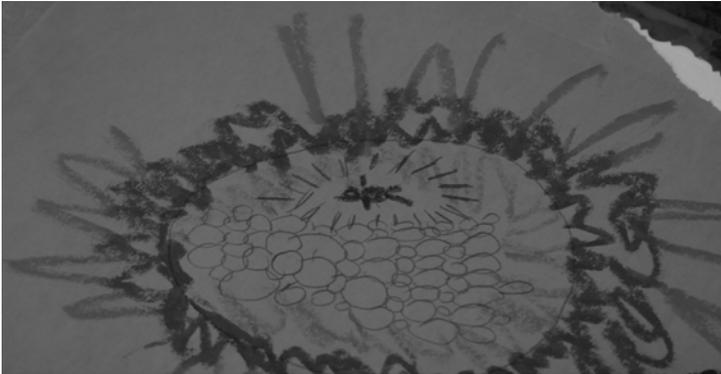


*Figure 20. Preserves.*

4. Has perfectionism impacted how you read or apply the Bible to your life?

Elvis uses a structure to read the Bible that he has established as a result of his perfectionism. His method is highly structured and organized, which “for [him], [is] the way of integrity.” The image of a canning shelf is a wonderful representation of this because, while the shelves are orderly and structured, they hold “juicy” contents within. Rather than ridding the shelf of colour and life, the structure sustains those vital elements.

Elvis' routine for reading the Bible is structured but not stressful. His approach makes the most sense for his learning style, is life giving, and nurtures his spirit. The way perfectionism encourages Elvis to continue using his highly organized system of reading the Bible is positive, and is beneficial for his spiritual life.



*Figure 21. Community.*

5. Has perfectionism impacted your desire for community with other Christians?

Elvis is naturally an extrovert and if it were not for perfectionism he would spend too much time with others. The fact that he spends time away from people shows how, “perfectionism is serving [him], is serving [him] to preserve [him], so that by preserving [him] it can help [him] serve again.” The rigidity of perfectionism allows him to be healthy because it establishes boundaries around the amount of time he spends with others.

The image Elvis drew is of himself and a group of people in the middle of a circle. He is the figure at the top of the circle who is both a part of the group, and is also separate. His separateness from the others is positive because it allows him to recharge so he is more refreshed when he returns to work. Perfectionism is a positive influence in his

life as it creates boundaries for the amount of time he spends with others, which is positive for his spiritual life.



*Figure 22. Fuel in the engine.*

6. Has perfectionism impacted your desire to serve in the church?

Elvis feels that perfectionism allows him to see potential in individuals, as well as for his church as a whole. The desire to see those potentials be attained inspires and motivates him to pursue new goals, and “more often the case than not, [perfectionism] motivates [him], and excites [him], and fuels [his] desire to serve the church.”

The image Elvis has to answer this question is a cut out of an engine in the shape of a drop of gasoline. Perfectionism powers the engine, and “pushes [him] to do good things, in terms that it fuels [his] desire to get up every morning.” Elvis acknowledges that in some circumstances, perfectionism can act like a hole in the engine, causing gasoline to leak out. In his case, however, perfectionism is the energy that fuels change.

Perfectionism has impacted Elvis' desire to serve in his church in a positive way, which has been positive for his spiritual life.



*Figure 23.* Humming bird.

7. Has perfectionism impacted your experience of solitude?

The image of the hummingbird drinking nectar from a flower is a symbol of what solitude does spiritually for Elvis. Solitude brings him energy and sustains him, but perfectionism holds him back from engaging in solitude more regularly. Perfectionism has a negative effect on Elvis' experience of solitude as he feels pushed to be involved in so many activities and there is little time left for solitude. The impact of this has been negative for Elvis' spiritual life.



*Figure 24. Winter.*

8. Has perfectionism impacted your family life, specifically your marriage relationship?

In this image the house in a snow covered yard contains two symbols that are a “powerful” representation of how Elvis’ family once was. The first symbol is the weather which represents how Elvis, because of his perfectionism, would be “chilly” towards his wife. During our interview he made sure to highlight that this was not the result of her actions. She was always “great” towards him, but his coldness would remain despite that.

In terms of his children, Elvis did not think that perfectionism created coldness between him and them. He has seen, however, that perfectionism has impacted them. After our interview Elvis chose to ask his children about their experiences with his perfectionism. During which time, he realized that the impact was bigger than he had originally thought.

The second major symbol shows the photograph ripped into different pieces. The torn image represents what could have happened to his family if perfectionism had continued on in his life. Fortunately, his perfectionism lessened and did not lead to that destruction. Perfectionism has had a negative impact on Elvis' family life, as well as his spiritual life.



*Figure 25. Warrior.*



*Figure 26. Canoeing.*

9. Has perfectionism impacted your experience of worship; corporate or private?  
To give some background for this response, Elvis shared that the worship in his Pentecostal church is charismatically based. However he desires to engage in a more liturgical form of worship because that is how he connects with God. His

perfectionism presents itself through [his] need for structure, for order, and that's part of [his] perfectionism that [he] like[s]... he see[s] that part as a friend, not always in every case, but in most cases. And in terms of [his] worship and in terms of corporate worship, [he] really like[s] structured worship, [he] like[s] orderly worship... [he is] a Pentecostal, and when people think of Pentecostals, they think... of spontaneous, charismatic, kind of free worship... non-liturgical.

And [he does] like that, but... [he is increasingly] getting fascinated by liturgical worship.

Elvis chose two images for this question, one image is the head of a soldier, and the other is a man paddling a canoe. The images send fairly opposite messages. The soldier is leaning forward evidently ready to engage in battle, while the man in the canoe is relaxed with a look of curiosity and interest on his face. Both the soldier and the paddler are intentionally moving towards certain destinations, but are using very different approaches.

As Elvis looked for the image of the soldier, he discussed his struggle regarding corporate praise. Elvis sees value in both liturgical and charismatic worship. The issue is, his church appears closed to liturgical praise which means he cannot worship in a way that is meaningful to him without going elsewhere.

As his passion to see changes in their worship style came through, there was vivid energy in his voice and eyes. The image of the soldier resonated with him on a certain level because he felt as though there was going to be a battle before any movement would happen.

After finding the soldier, Elvis then decided the image was maybe too dramatic, and was potentially communicating harm. His intent is to not cause destruction in making changes, but he does sense the need for them, and has a clear idea of what they could be. He then resumed his search until he found the image of the man in the canoe. This gentle but intentional approach suits him better.

Elvis realizes there may be situations where he has to be strong like a soldier, but he wants that to be the minority of situations. He would rather go along at a peaceful pace that brings gradual change, rather than drastic change. The combination of his perfectionism along with being in a church that is not open to liturgical worship have been adverse for his experience of praise. These two elements have been negative for his spiritual life.



*Figure 27. Smiling women.*

10. Has perfectionism impacted your experience, or acceptance of grace?

The image for this response has two sections in it. The first is the central one with two women standing together posing for a picture. The second image is to the left of the first, and has a woman who is upside down. The reason for this is, “perfectionism is the thing... that could turn the picture upside down... [and] the smiles would become frowns.”

Perfectionism has caused certain difficulties in Elvis’ life, and as a result, he has even more gratitude for God’s grace. Perfectionism would remove Elvis’ joy if there was no grace. He emphasizes this by saying, “perfectionism could zap [him] of the grace of God and turn [his] smile into a frown, but it doesn’t, it pushes [him] towards Him and towards others.” Because perfectionism is kept in check through God’s grace, it has a

positive effect on his perception of grace. Elvis' experience of grace is positive for his spiritual life.



*Figure 28. Colourful boxes.*

11. Are there any other ways perfectionism has impacted you that have not yet been discussed?

Elvis began by sharing that in a career previous to being a pastor, he was given an extraordinarily complex and taxing administrative role. Altogether the task took several years to be completed. Looking back, Elvis realizes that while the process required a lot from him, he relished it. The clear cut criteria he was given during the work established concrete goals for him to pursue, which made progress tangible. Doing this administrative work was perfectionistic in nature because everything had to be fulfilled in an exact way, which was energizing and fulfilling for him.

The image of colourful fabrics in separate compartments represents Elvis' desire for his church. He knows from experience that structure does not have to take away from movement and energy, and often, is what allows for it. Elvis wants there to be just

enough structure at his church that it supports creativity, vibrancy, and diversity. This is hard to achieve without clear criteria for what the structure should look like.

Church work can be frustrating to Elvis' perfectionistic affinity for structure, because of its lack of definitive goals. To cope with the frustrations he pursues God, which is "when [they] have the healthiest conversations."

The immediate impact of perfectionism that Elvis feels is a frustration that is not spiritually beneficial. The positive aspect of that, however, is that frustration pushes Elvis to seek God and this has a positive influence on his spiritual life.

12. Has perfectionism ever served you well in your relationship with God? If so, how?

Elvis did not choose an image for this question. Perfectionism is beneficial for Elvis when he reads and studies the Bible. Perfectionism has also been positive in terms of his experience of grace. He explains that,

by and large, [his] perfectionism and [the] expectations... haven't been a millstone around [his] neck. [He does not] think they [have] dragged [him] down the majority of the time... [He has] seen [perfectionism] more as an asset than a detriment, but when it has been a detriment, ooh it's been heavy.

Around sixty percent of his experiences with perfectionism have had negative repercussions, but taken into perspective with the positives of it, the overall impact has been neutral in his life. Perfectionism in Elvis' life has been positive for his relationship with God in the ways that are described above.

13. Has perfectionism ever been a detriment to your spiritual life? If so, how?

Elvis did not choose an image for this question. He did, however, share that perfectionism has been a detriment to his spiritual life in connection with the difficulties it has caused in his marriage and family.



*Figure 29.* Lurking tiger.

14. Does perfectionism eat away at your spiritual life?

When answering this question, the first word Elvis said was, “yes.” He describes perfectionism as being a presence that is often “eating around the edges.” Though Elvis does not think the tiger in the image looks threatening, he feels the look in its eyes suggests that something could happen at any moment. For this reason the tiger needs to be kept under surveillance.

For Elvis, “perfectionism is kind of like that... [he has] had to keep [the tiger] at a healthy distance, but every once in a while you know [the tiger is] probably up to no good.” Elvis, having learned to keep an eye on perfectionism, is now able to keep it under control and not allow it to get out of hand, or become detrimental. As a result perfectionism is no longer able to eat away at his spiritual life except at those times when it begins to sneak up again and has a negative impact.

## Warren



*Figure 30. Warren's collage.*



*Figure 31. Man looking over Inca village.*

### 1. How do you see your current relationship with God?

The image of a man looking out onto an Inca village symbolizes Warren's journey in life. Although the man in the image appears to be alone, Warren does not feel alone in his life. God is his constant companion. Knowing God in a personal way makes Warren secure and comfortable, but he also has a great sense of awe for God's vastness. God brings him hope in times of sorrow and pain, which gives him an "overall sense of well being." His relationship with God has a positive impact on his spiritual life.



*Figure 32. War torn field.*

## 2. How do you imagine God ‘sees’ you?

In this image there is a woman walking in a field devastated by violence, but when looked at closely, the woman is smiling despite her chaotic surroundings. When Warren encounters pain and suffering in his life he remains joyful because God roots him in hope and security. Warren knows from Christian doctrine that Christ’s sacrifice pays the price for transgressions, allowing for hope and joy to remain in life despite sin. This is the reason Warren continues to be joyful while living in a fallen world.

Although Warren is filled with God's joy, there are still struggles in his life. It is difficult for him to readily receive God’s blessings of acceptance and unconditional love. He feels that he needs to earn the gifts before receiving them, while also knowing cerebrally that he does not need to. This dichotomy causes an oscillation between the two sentiments, and is

sometimes... a struggle but overall [he's] fairly confident with unconditional love and acceptance. Sometimes [he] feel[s] it's an earning thing, and that's a battle of the mind. But it's not as strong as [his] spirit feels... unconditional love and acceptance.

This positively impacts Warren's spiritual life, because he knows that he is “allowed to fail and still be accepted.”



*Figure 33. Out on a limb.*

### 3. Has perfectionism impacted your prayer life?

Warren’s prayer life used to be impregnated with doubt. He would wonder whether his “prayer [would] be heartfelt by God, because [he thought] it wasn't a good enough prayer.” This would happen when his “perfectionistic standard[s] got in the way of [engaging in] prayer to it's greatest extent.”

Doubts, stemming from Warren’s perfectionism, were not only present during his prayer time but also affected numerous other areas of his Christian walk. Warren often felt guilty, and thought he was “not making it” as a Christian and believed that he “couldn't measure up to the standard[s] God had.” This sense of inadequacy contributed to Warren feeling unworthy of accepting God's love which made it incredibly important for him to pray correctly. He believed that if he could reach these standards the guilt for not being perfect would subside. Then, and only then, he would feel he could receive God's love.

Over the past five years, the influence of perfectionism has diminished in Warren's life because he has been intentionally working through it. When asked about the shift that has been happening, he said it has not been quick or easy. However, there have been certain changes in his mentality that have been pivotal for diminishing the impact of perfectionism. One of those changes came when he heard the expression "we can fail forward." Permission to fail has been very important for helping Warren let go of perfectionism.

Another important change has been in gaining the ability to say "no" to people at church. In the past he would feel incredible pressure to say "yes" to everyone who asked him to do tasks. Warren said he used to believe that "as a servant we take up the towel, and we wash people's feet, and we never say 'no'... so it's been very liberating... knowing that [he] can still keep [his] job and say 'no' to things." The result of having the liberty to say 'no' has made him a better pastor because he is serving out of a sense of freedom rather than bondage.

Still another change is that many of his previous standards no longer exist, such as needing to pray for an hour every morning. Warren can pray for five minutes and be content. He thinks that even though the Apostle Paul encourages people to "pray without ceasing" it does not limit prayer to a morning time frame. Warren is no longer afraid of making mistakes during prayer, because he knows that God accepts his imperfect prayers. Warren has gained much wisdom, made significant changes, and experienced "great revelation[s] of truth" over the past five years.

Huge steps towards healing from perfectionism have been taken by Warren, but complete healing is “still being discovered... [and] uncovered.” Today, Warren connects with God through prayer, no longer bombarded by the doubt and guilt of perfectionism. Prayer allows Warren to see himself from God's loving perspective. This helps Warren maintain a healthy self image. His healthy prayer life has influenced his ministry on many levels and allows him to remain confident in his identity and his relationship with God. He now thinks that even if he was fired for saying ‘no’, it would be alright, because of the security he has in Christ.

When asked during the second interview if perfectionism impacts his prayer in a way that is positive, neutral, or negative for his spiritual life, Warren responded “neutral.” In the past Warren said perfectionism was negative, but the overall picture is neutral because God has been with him during this process.



*Figure 34. Walking on shore.*

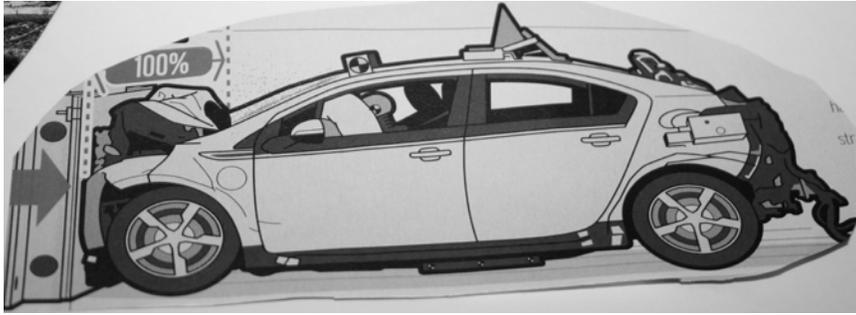
#### 4. Has perfectionism impacted how you read or apply the Bible to your life?

Warren's perfectionism sets a high standard for following the commands of the Bible. He finds it disheartening when he does not live up to those commands in the ways he expects he should. His motivation to read the Bible diminishes as he becomes discouraged from not reaching his self established standards. He thinks “that the

perfectionist tendency has to do with [believing he has] to follow the Bible to a 'T'... [and] do everything it says, [and] understand everything it says to [him].” The image of the boy running along the shore represents this struggle. Instead of getting into the water so that he can catch fish, he stays on the dry sand. Going into the water symbolizes the intentionality that goes along with bringing people to Christ. As a Christian and a pastor, Warren feels called to share the message of salvation, which is expressed in Jesus’ metaphor about disciples being “fishers of men” (Matthew 4:19, English Standard Version). Warren does not feel as though he does this enough, which makes him wonder

if perfectionism keeps [him] from going into the deeper water; keeps [him] from trusting God... in terms of how [he] may pray for people, or witness to people, [or] share [his] faith with people. Because [he does not] want them to see [him as] imperfect if they don't get healed, [or] they don't get saved... Perfectionism can keep us... from stepping into that water because we don't want to let our flaws show, we don't want to let our mistakes show, [and] we don't want to appear like we've failed if it doesn't work.

The fear of being seen as imperfect holds Warren back from engaging in the risks that are associated with evangelism. While these fears were more difficult for him a few years ago, they sometimes still affect him. When perfectionism had a strong hold on how stringently Warren felt he needed to apply the Bible in his life, it had a negative effect. This was also negative for him spiritually.



*Figure 35. Feeling squished.*

5. Has perfectionism impacted your desire for community with other Christians?

Warren considers himself to be an introvert who tends to limit the amount of time he spends with others. In certain scenarios, such as when he is in the foyer after church, there are incredible numbers of people who want to speak with him. Warren finds this to be aggravating as it is difficult from him to hear people in this setting and time constraints make it almost impossible to engage in meaningful conversation. These issues decrease Warren's desire to spend time in certain social Church gatherings.

Warren's perfectionism used to evoke a considerably potent desire to please people. Warren had "some difficulties in associating with others, because [he would] feel [he had] to perform, [he would] have to be somebody for them." Warren said it was "an eye opener... stepping into this career path [because] the expectations [laymen] have on pastors... [are] weighty."

The pressure increased when people put him on a pedestal by incessantly calling him 'pastor' rather than by his real name. He felt a significant amount of pressure from his need to heed the opinions of influential members in the congregation. This was especially true with those who would contribute a lot of money or time to the church. In general he believes such expectations put pastors in difficult situations because of what can be lost if

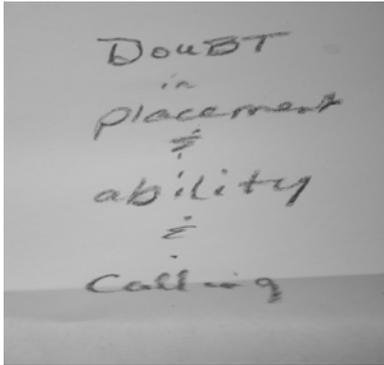
those expectations are not satisfied. In the past, to cope with the pressure Warren would avoid people who were likely to reinforce unrealistic expectations. Warren feels that “unless you're really secure, and you're not afraid of losing your job, or anything, then you can feel that weight and pressure, [and] that's really unhealthy.” When pastors are driven to satisfy people, they can “lose [their] family in terms of time and quality... lose [their] hobbies, [and] lose [their] health.”

Warren’s image of the car being squished expresses how the church “community plows [pastors] with these expectations of perfection. You're the pastor, you should be healing, you should be delivering, you should be there for [them] when [they] want you.” The pastor gets crumpled from one side as they pressure him to fulfill everyone’s requests. The other side of the car gets crumpled due to the pastor’s self imposed pressure to reach personal goals.

The results of both societal expectations and self expectations are “not healthy, [it is] sad actually... [Pastors] go around, in a sense crippled... [and they are] not whole to be able to minister wholly to other[s].” For these reasons, Warren feels that pastors who deal with perfectionism would benefit greatly from addressing it as soon as possible.

Another issue is when congregations desire for the pastor to be a certain way and this does not line up with the pastor’s values. The pastor is then faced with an internal battle, in which they go back and forth between what they personally want, and what others want from them. Warren gave as an example the expectation for pastors to wear suits every Sunday, he points out that this does not make one more holy.

Feeling pressure to cater to others was a very real issue for over half of Warren's career. During that time it drained his desire to be in community, and was negative for his spiritual life.



*Figure 36. Doubt.*

6. Has perfectionism impacted your desire to serve in the church?

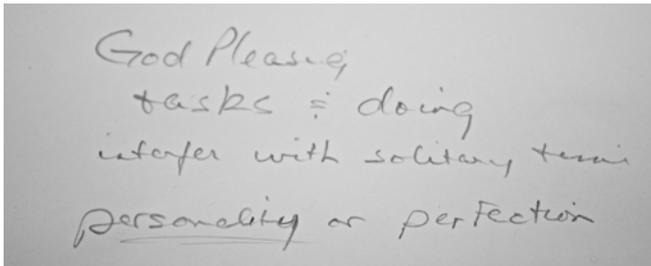
When perfectionism was more influential in Warren's life it depleted his sense of self assurance. In the early years of his career "it was very difficult physically [and] mentally... [because his] perfectionist tendency caused over compensation."

Perfectionism made him doubt his placement, his ability as a pastor, and his calling. He felt he had "to be on twenty four-seven" in order to please God, which greatly affected his desire to serve in the church. As was previously discussed, he also felt that because he was not a perfect pastor he needed to compensate by doing everything people asked of him.

Warren thinks "perfectionism is a key problem" as it influences pastors to leave ministry. Social stigmas reinforce that pastors should never "show [their] flaws." Warren feels that even pastors who love being in ministry and know they are called to be there,

may still leave because of perfectionism. When pastors feel they cannot please others or God, many will “think a lot about leaving because how much stress can a person take?”

Perfectionism has negatively impacted Warren’s desire to serve in ministry, his desire for prayer, for reading the Bible, for fellowship, and for worship. Warren feels that every aspect of a person’s spiritual life can be negatively influenced by perfectionism.



*Figure 37. Solitude.*

#### 7. Has perfectionism impacted your experience of solitude?

Warren enjoys being involved in church activities because they are life giving, comforting, and bless him with joy. There is no guilt pushing him to be as active as he is. Yet, despite his healthy desire to accomplish tasks, he is still impacted by perfectionism. If people feel they “are not perfect, [and] can't measure up to God, [they] might avoid seeking... necessary solitude times.” The busyness that comes from compensating for not being perfect is an effective way to side step being quiet with God. Warren points out that “we can use the tasks... to cover up the fact that God is saying ‘I need you to come away and spend some time with me.’” Stillness with God can be intimidating for perfectionists because of the chance of being faced with one's faults.

Warren thinks the impact perfectionism has on his engagement with solitude is negative for his spiritual life because, “we’ve been created with [the] need to know God” so when “we’re not spending time getting to know God [he] thinks that's [going to have] a negative impact on us spiritually.”



*Figure 38. Camping.*

8. Has perfectionism impacted your family life, specifically your marriage relationship?

The tents and empty camping chair represent the impact perfectionism used to have on Warren’s family. The tents contain the family members while the empty chair belongs to the father figure who is away working in ministry.

Warren feels that perfectionists tend to leave their families in the background in order to please others. Five years ago perfectionism drove Warren to spend copious amounts of energy and time at church. This greatly depleted what he had left for his family. The amount he worked was fuelled from “needing to be perfect in running programs, needing to please everybody and sensing that [this]... pleased a perfect God.” This “put a lot of pressure on [him] physically, spiritually, emotionally” as well as impacting his family. At times his wife felt ministry was more important than their

marriage. The stress caused by perfectionism during that season was negative for both his spiritual life and his family life.

Despite having “over indulged in the ministry... to the detriment of [his] family,” repentance and forgiveness have allowed the family to move forward. Warren and his wife have been able to work together towards finding a balance. For them, this means he only works one or two nights a week. Warren not only lives out these changes, he encourages others to find balance as well, because “perfectionists... will try to do things to please people and then family is kind of floating somewhere in the background and that's not a healthy thing.”



*Figure 39. Walking away.*

9. Has perfectionism impacted your experience of worship; corporate or private?

At one time, because of Warren’s perfectionism he found it difficult to engage in worship on a genuine level. He did not feel worthy to draw close to God. While Warren does not now experience this, he can see that others in his church probably do. The image above has a club house, but to Warren the building represents a church. The man and woman walking away from the ‘church’ represent what happens when perfectionists come to worship on Sunday morning. They may appear to be praising “but really they're walking away... from [worship] because their perfectionistic tendencies cause [them] to

feel they're not worthy to participate... [They are] sitting there, but [they are] not really there... because [they] feel imperfect... for a perfect God.” When Warren was experiencing this in his worship, it cut him off from God and had a negative impact on his experience of worship, which in turn, was negative for his spiritual life.



*Figure 40. Grace.*

10. Has perfectionism impacted your experience, or acceptance of grace?

Warren believes that “if [people] really grasped grace, then... perfectionism would dissipate.” He sees grace as a pivotal piece of the Christian walk, but thinks perfectionists are missing out on it. Warren demonstrated his concept by writing ‘grace’ in big letters in the centre of the image above. After that he wrote ‘perfectionism’ in even larger letters above it. If people “embraced this word [grace] then perfectionism would be tremendously diminished, rather than being this big word over top of grace.” He then crossed out the largely printed ‘perfectionism’, and drew a tiny little ‘perfectionism’ underneath the word ‘grace’.

Accepting grace can be a hurdle for people because the concept is difficult to understand. Warren feels there can even be an internal block to accepting it. In the past when he did not accept grace, it was negative for his spiritual life. Warren has not had

enough time to reflect on grace in terms of how he currently relates to it on a personal level. He feels, “the more [he] understand[s] it, the more it has a positive impact on [his] spirituality, because it covers the feelings, [and] it covers the perfectionist tendencies.”

11. Are there any other ways perfectionism has impacted you, that have not yet been discussed?

Warren did not choose an image for this question. Warren thinks being perfectionistic is a form of bondage that should be addressed as soon as possible in people’s lives so they “are in a position to explore life, enjoy life, [and] minister to other[s].” He also feels that perfectionism is the result of people trying to be God, in the sense of trying to emulate God’s perfection. The bondage and distortions perfectionism have caused in Warren’s life have been spiritually negative for him.

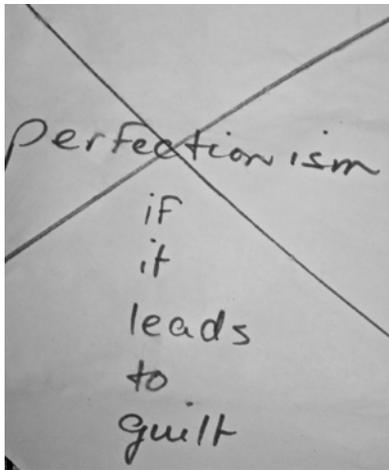


Figure 41. Perfection and guilt.

12. Has perfectionism ever served you well in your relationship with God? If so, how?

Warren does “not think [he can] say [perfectionism] has” been beneficial for his relationship with God. When perfectionism is part of the fabric of someone’s life, they

experience unnatural guilt from unrealistic standards with regards to their actions, behaviours, and thoughts.

Warren believes that people who are perfectionists have a very narrow focus as to their belief regarding what is perfect and how one defines perfection. It is difficult for perfectionists to accept others disagreeing with them because they generally do not see life outside of their own narrow perspective.

Warren feels that God desires excellence rather than perfection from humanity. The difference between excellence and perfection is that with perfectionism people, “don't allow [themselves] room to make mistakes, to be ok with goofing up, messing up. As a result, [they] heap on... guilt that prevents [them] from living more at liberty.” His experiences of perfectionism causing unnatural guilt have been negative for his spiritual life.



*Figure 42.* Barren land.

13. Has perfectionism ever been a detriment to your spiritual life? If so, how?

Warren feels that perfectionism used to interfere with his ability to draw close to God, it “can leave a person [with] a sense of barrenness in their relationship with God...

[and cause] their spiritual condition [to] get dry.” When perfectionism made Warren’s spiritual life barren, it was negative.



*Figure 43. Treads.*

#### 14. Does perfectionism eat away at your spiritual life?

The treads on tires can be worn down from use, just as a persons' spiritual life can be worn down by perfectionism. Warren says “the more we [try] to be perfect in everything we do, or a lot of things we do, without recognizing that perfectionism [is present], [causes] the tires, the spiritual life, [to]slowly get[] worn down.” When pastors are weighed down by too much self imposed pressure to be perfect, their effectiveness decreases. Over time the pressure wears them down to the point they feel unable to serve in ministry and the impact is spiritually negative.

Warren thinks the moments in life that should be considered perfect occur when there is no planned intention behind them. In his work as a pastor people often thank him for saying, or doing something helpful although sometimes he has no memory of what it was he actually said or did. Without putting in extra effort to give a perfect answer, or do something special, the process just happened naturally. This was “perfectly what



1. How do you see your current relationship with God?

The image of the beach resonates with Mary because she connects deeply with God when she is near large bodies of water. Mary often walks by the river, and whenever possible she walks by the ocean. Being in close proximity to water makes her feel “really close to His presence.” In the image, there is a person on the left hand side who is blurry. That person represents how God is present during her journey. Mary’s relationship with God is very spiritually positive.

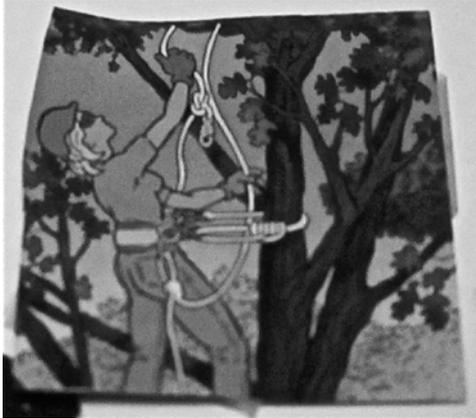


*Figure 46. Freely running.*

2. How do you imagine God 'sees' you?

A horse running freely is a recurring metaphor in Mary's life and depicts how God sees her. The horse has the ability to choose where and when it runs, but can be reigned in if needed. In their relationship God has been “working with the wild horse to bring it into control, but... not breaking the spirit.” When God asks Mary to move in a certain direction, stop, or change what she is doing, she ultimately responds. God does not remove her “strength, or [remove her] free will, but [is] bringing [her to] a place of trusting Him so that [she is] totally obedient, but can still have the wildness, the control, and the strength of the horse.” Mary likes her independence, but she does not desire it to the exclusion of God. The process of balancing independence with obedience to God has

been a dynamic process for Mary. Mary envisions God seeing her as a galloping horse and this is spiritually positive for her.



*Figure 47. Life line.*

3. Has perfectionism impacted your prayer life?

Mary's prayer life began when she was told she should pray and perfectionism offered her the structure and motivation to do so. Over time perfectionism has decreased in her life and prayer has transformed from an obligatory routine to an abundant life giving practice. Mary finds that prayer is now her life line and her "breath." Prayer is her security from falling, which is symbolized by the ropes holding the arborist to the tree. Mary's prayer life, no longer influenced by perfectionism has a positive influence on her spiritual life.



*Figure 48. Journey.*



*Figure 49. Discovery.*

4. Has perfectionism impacted how you read or apply the Bible to your life?

Mary began reading the Bible because others advised her to and because perfectionism propelled her to fulfill the standard. In the early days she felt she needed to use pre-made reading plans, even though they did not suit her. Perfectionism has since been minimized in her life.

Today, reading the Bible is a very different experience, “it’s more just directed by [what] the Holy Spirit wants [her] to read...” The two images depict how reading the Bible is an enjoyable journey, and opens up a world of discovery. Mary finds pleasure in reading scripture because perfectionism no longer dictates the process as an obligation. This change has made the experience positive for her spiritual life.



*Figure 50.* By herself.

5. Has perfectionism impacted your desire for community with other Christians?

The woman in the image is traveling alone, which is how Mary sees portions of her own life. Mary's desire for Christian community is significantly impacted by three factors. Firstly, she is always around others in ministry, and as a result her desire to be around Christians when she is not working is diminished. The second factor is that some Christians continually ask Mary for favours and this takes away from her desire to spend time with them. The third factor is tied to perfectionism in which she feels “there's a certain way [she] need[s] to be around Christians.” When Mary “perform[s], or [tries] to act a certain way, or be a certain way for people, it takes a lot of energy and [she] can never put [her] guard down.” Part of the issue is that when Mary does not censor herself around Christians, they will say “oh, you do that?... should you do that? Should you say that?” Mary finds that “Christians are the worst for judging, so it's difficult to be who” she is with them.

The desire to stay away from Christians during her free time has been diminishing over the past while. She still tends to find it easier to be alone than to be with most

Christians. Perfectionism has had a negative impact on her desire for Christian community, which has also been negative for her spiritual life.



*Figure 51. Sacrifice.*

6. Has perfectionism impacted your desire to serve in the church?

While there are parts of Mary's work that energize her, difficulties arise when she sacrifices substantial amounts of time and energy and her wellbeing disintegrates.

The image above is symbolic of Christ's crucifixion and "even though it might seem sacrilegious" it represents Mary's past experiences of working in the church. Perfectionism drove her to work so hard that she was "dying for the church... you do everything, you kill yourself for the church."

From a physical perspective, stress and fatigue from overwork caused Mary's kidney disease to flare up, literally shortening her life. On a relational level, her marriage suffered because when she was at home her thoughts were so occupied with ministry she was not fully present for her husband.

One of the difficulties for Mary was that the programs she put her energy into did extremely well. The fact that she was suffering so much did not show up in her work. People would frequently tell her that everything she was a part of became "gold." Mary

would see positive results, hear encouraging comments, and automatically assume that because the ministries were blessed, they must have been God's will for her. So in spite of the huge personal costs she chose to continue.

Five years ago Mary's work load escalated to the point where the work load was impossible to maintain. She was pushed to the point where she was finally able to hear God tell her even though "things were good [in her ministries]... they weren't His will." This was a life changing lesson, after which Mary began to let go of many of the ministries she was involved with. She began by listening to God to see what she should keep doing, and what she needed to release.

Mary used to sacrifice herself for the church, "but Jesus already did that so [she does not] need to do that, [now] it's [about] getting to the place where [she is] walking that out, and not feeling that [she needs] to be everything to everybody."

Implementing boundaries around how much she works is helpful for Mary. She admits it continues to be hard for her to give projects over to others because perfectionism creates the fear that they will not do the work "as right" as she does. When Mary's perfectionism pushes her to do projects because others expect her to, this negatively impacts her desire to serve in the church and is negative for her spiritual life.



*Figure 52. The drive.*

7. Has perfectionism impacted your experience of solitude?

In the past perfectionism would keep Mary constantly moving. There was always something to be accomplished and she did not want to take time for solitude until everything was finished. This drive existed for Mary even before she went into ministry.

She remembers she

couldn't enjoy solitude, because [she] was always going... and guilty, are you kidding? No, no stopping... Even when [she] had the kids and stuff, [she] couldn't stop, [she] had to keep working, if they were sleeping [she] cleaned the house, [she] couldn't go out. It was bad when [her] kids were little... [she was a] terrible perfectionist... had to clean the house several times a week... [she] was a terribly sick person.

Over time, Mary has been able to disengage from the need to continually be accomplishing and doing. Mary now enjoys the process of completing tasks because she is no longer driven to finish them as fast as possible. She takes time to be away from work, even if it means risking the disapproval of colleagues. This has been a significant change in her life. Perfectionism, when it was impacting her ability to take time for solitude, had a negative effect on both her experience of solitude and her spiritual life.



*Figure 53. The herd.*

8. Has perfectionism impacted your family life, specifically your marriage relationship?

Elephant herds have a strong sense of unity, which emulates how Mary's family currently functions. In the past, however, the situation was different. Mary said that when her children were small, she wore three different masks, "the perfect mother, the perfect wife, and the perfect Christian... [but] it was impossible to maintain." Part of the difficulty of sustaining those masks was that if one began to crumble, all of them did. This meant Mary was under continual pressure to maintain all three at once. In addition

to wanting herself to be a perfect mother, wife, and Christian, she also felt incredible pressure for her family to present themselves perfectly.

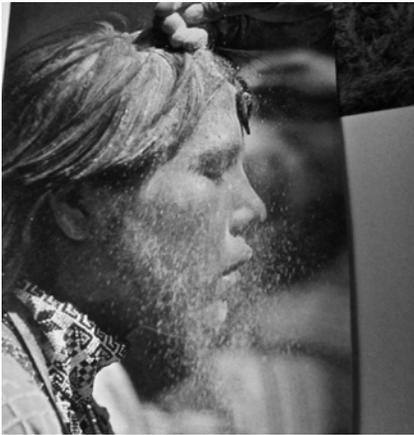
Mary noted that some of her need for perfection stemmed from her dysfunctional family of origin. Her heart was so badly wounded from that time in her life that she had no love for her husband for many years. Despite the lack of connection in her marriage, she fought to remain married because she did not want her children to suffer like she had. Mary believes she was able to remain in her marriage because of perfectionism. When a perfectionist has a specific goal they want to reach, the tendency is to withstand any number of struggles to achieve it. In this case, perfectionism gave her the ability to persevere through years of difficulty, and the end result was extremely positive.

As Mary healed from her childhood experiences, she was able to let go of the need to be perfect, allow her heart to heal, and begin to feel love for her husband.

If you don't heal, then you let shame keep [imperfections] covered up... because you think everyone else is perfect and you think everyone else has a perfect marriage, has perfect kids. Until you start letting down your walls [and] your masks, and be honest with people. Then you realize that they are struggling too.

When perfectionism was driving Mary to overwork, she was, thankfully, able to accept her husband's comments when he told her she was doing too much. If she not been able to hear his warnings and “had kept on that journey, yeah, [she] would have been totally emotionally disconnected from [her] husband.” She came to realize that God did not desire her to replace her spouse with ministry work. Had she continued to work at

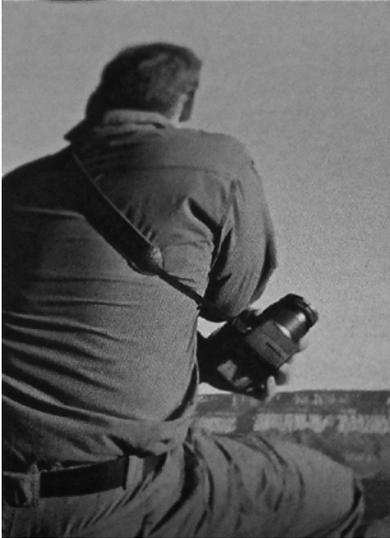
that pace “it would have been destructive” for their marriage. Mary’s perfectionism, overall, had a negative effect on her family life, her marriage, and her spirituality.



*Figure 54. Moments in praise.*

9. Has perfectionism impacted your experience of worship; corporate or private?

Mary’s perfectionism in the past, created the need for her to have a habitual pattern for worship that was negative for her spiritual life. As perfectionism has dwindled, worship has become a genuine opportunity to connect with God, and is now spiritually positive for Mary.



*Figure 55. Closed off.*

10. Has perfectionism impacted your experience, or acceptance of grace?

Just as the man in the image has turned his back to the camera Mary, because of her perfectionism, would turn her back on grace. Mary thought she did not deserve to receive grace because she felt unworthy and believed it was something she needed to earn. The reality is grace cannot be earned, it is freely given. Mary has gradually been able to accept grace as healing from perfectionism has taken place, and this has been a positive influence on her spiritual life.

11. Are there any other ways perfectionism has impacted you that have not yet been discussed?

No image was chosen for this question. Perfectionism causes Mary to be concerned with the way she looks as a Christian. What this means is, when God's spirit moves through her, she is uncomfortable with how it appears to others. An example comes from a time she was praying for someone who fell down (slain in the spirit) and it made her uncomfortable because others were watching.

Feeling concerned with how she looks as a Christian makes her uneasy with the thought of letting God's spirit lead her outside her comfort zone. Mary shuts out God's leading so that she does not have to deal with “always [wondering]... how is it going to make [her] look, [and] what are people going to think?” When perfectionism causes her to feel self conscious in this way, it is negative for her spiritual life.



*Figure 56. A puzzle.*

12. Has perfectionism ever served you well in your relationship with God? If so, how?

This image applies to Mary because she can not leave a puzzle until it is complete. Perfectionism is beneficial for Mary's relationship with God when it helps her to not give up on herself. God promises to bring people to a point of completion and she wants to see what that will look like for her life. Despite there being negative moments interspersed throughout her journey, overall, perfectionism has served Mary well in her relationship with God and this has been spiritually positive for her.



*Figure 57. Shoes to fill.*

13. Has perfectionism ever been a detriment to your spiritual life? If so, how?

This image has two meanings for Mary. The first is that Mary feels as though she cannot move forward spiritually when she does not trust God. She has difficulty trusting God because she wants to have control over her life. This makes it nearly impossible to move forward.

Secondly, in order to express that someone is taking on the responsibilities that another person once had, people use the colloquial term, 'they have big shoes to fill.' Mary's perfectionism can make those expectations so big in her life that those shoes are not just hard to fill, they are impossible to fill. Perfectionism can twist expectations out of the norm. This concept, along with Mary's lack of trust in God, are both negative forces for her spiritual life.



*Figure 58. The Great Wall of China.*

14. Does perfectionism eat away at your spiritual life?

For Mary, perfectionism creates a wall around her heart. Like the Great Wall of China in the image chosen, the wall around her heart has breaks in it. God is able to penetrate through in these places and touch her life. If there were no spaces for God to get into her heart, then her desire for excessive control and independence would have become overgrown and wild. Another problem would have been that God's nature in her life would have died away due to her heart being closed off by perfectionism. The propensity for perfectionism to build walls between Mary and God is negative and does eat away at her spiritual life.

**Personal experience**

I have included my own experiences with perfectionism which also help to shape my research and form the balance of this chapter.

*Perfection,*

*What does that even mean?*

*Is it a vice around your heart when things aren't to your standards?*

*A discomfort that seeps into your chest that supersedes all the rest?*

*What is perfection?*

*A spotless home, untouched, unscratched,*

*A shining car,*

*A toned, slim body?*

*Is it top marks,*

*the funniest jokes,*

*The most giving heart?*

*Does it exist?*

*I know it can't be reached,*

*I know it's a waste of time and effort to pursue a wisp of a dream.*

*But the allure is so strong,*

*magazines and commercials show me what is expected from a woman my age.*

*They show me smiles, polished teeth and sparkling eyes.*

*That is what I'm bred to want, at all costs.*

*But it's not real,*

*It's a photo shoot.*

*Hundreds, maybe thousands of hours go into air brushing each image.*

*I know that.*

*But why do I still strive for it?*

*A true impossibility.*

*If I could,  
If I knew how,  
I would let it go.*

*But I don't know how,  
I don't know how,*

*What does perfection cause?  
A dissatisfaction with what is,  
an inability to be deeply pleased with what I've done,  
There is no middle ground, there is no grey,  
I live in a land of extremes.*

May 2013

My personal experiences with perfectionism, which I will be sharing, have had a great influence on my decision to choose this research topic. This short biography demonstrates how perfectionism has developed and changed throughout my life. I have not followed the same format as the participants because this simply is meant to act as a supplement to their sharing.

A fair number of family members and life long friends have not realized how perfectionism has impacted my life. Although I have suffered a great deal from it, I have innately been able to mask it under different titles. In the past people have called me ambitious, hard working, and dedicated, but these have simply been veneers masking the

true issue. The subtlety of perfectionism has been a major reason why it has been so long standing in my life, and why others might miss opportunities to identify it.

My experiences span both past and present. In some ways I have processed a lot of what will be discussed, but some aspects of it still affect me. While much of what I will share appears to be the same struggles shared by many females, for me they were and are, rooted in perfectionism. I can easily trace the beginning of my journey with perfectionism to when I was six years old, but it could have been present even before then. I can remember wanting thinner fingers and expressing this displeasure to my parents and asking for liposuction surgery on them. Over time the desire to be thin grew, by grade-three I was comparing the size of my legs and arms to those of my friends. I can vividly remember planning how to lose weight so that I would be happy with myself. I can see how these patterns could easily have escalated into anorexia. Thankfully, however, there were numerous influences that prevented me from escalating to that point.

As I grew older, the desire to be attractive extended beyond my body. Like many young girls, brand name clothing became very important around sixth grade. My friends would shop at certain stores, and in order to be accepted I felt the need to shop at the same ones. While it is normal to strive for peer acceptance at that age, my desire was convoluted to another degree. I wanted to be accepted, and I thought the clothing would bring me a new identity, heighten my intrinsic value, and compensate for my flaws. In short, I thought it would give me the perfect life I had envisioned for myself.

For a few years I spent most of my income purchasing clothing, vainly hoping it would bring me fulfillment, but it never did. I came to accept that there would always be others who had more money and nicer clothing than I would. I decided in high school that it was not worth it to compete. I knew if I continued, I would end up disappointed, and have no money. As a result my desire to be a brand-name elite subsided almost entirely, but my yearning to be attractive remained. From an external perspective, it may have appeared that the end of my excessive shopping coincided with the end of my concern with physical appearance, but that was not the case. This experience showed me that perfectionism can subside in one way, but will not necessarily disappear entirely.

Though I have progressed in dealing with my low self image, it has not yet passed. While I no longer count the calories of everything I eat, or exercise excessively, my ideal would still be to look like a model. When I was in my mid-teens that desire was so strong that a boiling sense of disgust would rush over me when I looked in the mirror. Over time I have grown to accept that my healthy reality does not include being a model, a realization that no longer makes my insides crumble in defeat or frustration. Yet on a certain level I still idealize attractive women. Part of my desire to be thin has come from growing up in a society where stereotypically beautiful people are valued. My desire to feel like I have inherent worth has been a core issue for me in my struggle with perfectionism. No matter how many people have told me I am beautiful, that thought has never fully made its way into my heart. Recently I told my husband that I wished there was no fat on my arms. He later shared that “it doesn't worry [him] so much the fact that [I] notice there is fat, it's how mad [I am] at [myself] for having it” that concerns him

(Personal Communication, 2014). This is a sure sign that I have more healing to do in this area.

Another area of my life that perfectionism has touched is athletics. I was always embarrassed that I was not the top competitor in sports. For years I believed that I would find fulfillment if I could be the best in everything. At the age of fifteen I went to the World competition for a martial art that I had been involved in since I was very young. It had been my dream for many years to be able to go to the competition. As is so typical of my perfectionism, I genuinely believed that competing would mean I would no longer have self esteem issues, others would respect me, and people would desire to be like me. Leading up to the competition I agonized and idealized about how my results would impact my life.

In short I was bitterly disappointed. Going to the competition did not bring me the popularity or attention I had envisioned. Being chosen to compete did not make me more beautiful, nor did it magically transform my life. I was still the 'too stocky', 'unattractive', 'not smart enough' girl that I was before the competition. After experiencing that let down, it took a few years to unwind myself from associating athletics with excessive value. I now think that sports have many honourable attributes and are beneficial for numerous reasons, but when sports are used to set the standard for self worth they can be detrimental. When one area reflects the majority of a person's identity, there can be great potential for harm. Specifically if that area can not be sustained, or when it does not reap the results the person expected from it. Getting to this view of sports has taken a lot of work on my part because I allowed perfectionism to build them up to be so incredibly important.

The third major area in which I have experienced perfectionism has been with the appearance of my physical surroundings. In my growing up years I believed my family's house could never be stylish enough, and I worried about that. Looking back, I am astounded that I did not realize sooner how minutely important that is. Although one could say from a financial perspective an attractive home has practical value, and helps with resale profit margins, beyond that it is not important. The appearance of a house does not indicate the richness of the lives and relationships that are shared within it, of which my family has a rare abundance.

In relation to my family's house I have largely been able to let go of aesthetic concerns. In terms of my own space, I am still working through my high expectations around stylistic appearance. In my mind I am able to say that the appearance of a home has no value beyond one's life time and should be approached as such. What is frustrating beyond measure is that even knowing this, I still have an extremely strong desire to have an above average home in the future. This is yet another area in which healing will continue, and again demonstrates how perfectionism can subside in one specific area but continue on in other ways.

Perfectionism also shapes my beliefs in regards to how I want things to function in my life. It does not involve the thought "I need to be perfect," but rather it is expressed through feelings of urgency towards wanting to have something accomplished. When that 'thing' is not done, or is not done in the way I hoped it would be, I feel stress and tension. The physical sensation of it is like a weight in my head, chest, and/or stomach, and sometimes it mimics the nervous butterfly sensation people get when they are worried.

When perfectionism is at work in my life, I feel stressed until I achieve what I am working on. The stress does not inspire me to complete tasks in a positive manner. Instead it looms over me like a constant weight. The basic premise is that I feel “this would be better if I could...” Yet when I do change something, or complete something, it never brings the satisfaction I have yearned for.

Perfectionism has been a vindictive force over the past several years of my post-secondary education. From the beginning it has created an internal drive to “want to be finished already.” I have not wanted to take my time with school because I fear that going slowly will draw out the pain of having to process my shortcomings. As a perfectionist I want my imperfections to be painlessly erased, I do not want to have to work through them, I do not want to be associated with them for any length of time. This desire has pushed me to overload with courses, and often rush through my work, both of which have proven to have a negative impact for the depth and quality of my learning.

The roots of my struggles throughout elementary, junior high, and high school, are based in the belief that my being, the core of what I am, is incurably deficient. It was not until college that those roots began to be pulled up, at which time expressly spiritual repercussions from perfectionism were revealed.

To explain this further, when I was seven years old I experienced a profound sense of God's unconditional love that changed my understanding of life. Despite having such a transformational experience, as is common for many Christians, the incredible emotional connection to God's love began to fade with time. Since my conversion, part

of me has always yearned to return to that euphoric state. On a deep level I believed that making my life beyond reproach, would allow that to happen.

In Bible college, the desire to be intensely spiritually connected to God became my conscious goal. The college environment encouraged this as I was surrounded by people who appeared to have deeply intimate relationships with God. I often sensed that they were so closely connected because they had something I was lacking. This, combined with teachings on the importance of orthopraxy and orthodoxy began to establish standards in my heart. When I failed to achieve those standards I believed there was something intrinsically wrong with me and that I was tainted beyond even God's help. I pushed myself with the underlying hope that my piety would result in God's favour.

While there have been intermittent moments of connecting with God throughout my Christian journey, nothing has come close to my initial conversion experience. Despite understanding that God's love is ever present from a theological stand point, it is difficult not to believe there is something wrong with oneself when those tangible connections occur infrequently.

I felt for a long time that I needed to erase my personality in order to be good enough, and so I tried to become what I believed to be the standard of an ideal Christian. I would make myself read the Bible everyday, pray numerous times a day, serve the poor, always be willing to help people, raise my hands during worship, never drink, only listen to Christian music on the radio, etc. I want to clarify that not all of my Christian life was based on what I felt expected to do. Normally a mixture of personal desires

intertwined with perfectionistic pressure encouraged my behaviour, but overall my motivation came primarily from the latter.

An excerpt from my prayer journal during Bible college (another habit that I was trying to live up to) on Christmas day in 2007 says, “I want God to change me, *I am pushing myself* to be more like God, for more love, peace, patience, wisdom, intelligence, and to help others more” (emphasis mine). Inevitably my life did not change enough for me to feel like those types of prayers were being answered. When I failed to see those changes I felt substandard. Thinking that I needed to do more in order to measure up, I did exactly what was written in my prayer, I pushed myself.

The result was near burnout, I was drained emotionally, mentally, socially, spiritually, and physically. The standards I had set were unattainable, and I was left floundering. I wanted to know what I could fix, what I could change, and what I could force, in order to revisit the numinous experience of my conversion. I wanted to be the ideal Christian. When I could not make this happen, bitterness, guilt, and helplessness sank into my heart making me push harder towards setting more stringent goals. The lure with every new plan was that it would finally be the one that would get me where I wanted. Every time my plans failed, and I did not achieve perfection, the message that I was defective ran deeper, making my desire to push back even stronger. In hind sight it is obvious to me that perfectionism was rampant, but it was so much more difficult to see at the time.

A year after starting the program at St. Stephen's College I began to consciously realize that perfectionism had been a constant presence in my life for seventeen years.

My first response was to prescribe myself a 'healing from perfectionism guide' that would get me the perfection-free life I desired. Quickly, I realized that approach, in and of itself, was drenched in perfectionism. This realization has challenged me to look at what truly motivates my desire to heal.

After seeing how wide spread perfectionism was in my life, I began slowly learning to give myself permission to step back. This meant taking a break from following certain culturally bound Christian norms, and over committing. Some Christians might think it is helpful when they encourage me to pray in a certain way, go to church more, fast more, or spend more time with God in order to conquer perfectionism. I have realized that following those practices at this point in time will take me back to depending on perfectionistic standards, because I will expect certain results from my efforts. What would happen is that if my expectations were not fulfilled, it will likely end with me re-entering a dangerous cycle of trying to force-fix myself.

Finally, I am beginning to let go of requiring myself to behave in certain ways to please others. This is terrifying because so much of my identity has been built on that pursuit. Even typing these words brings a lump of worry to my chest because I am uncomfortable with the thought of others thinking poorly of me, misunderstanding my story, or judging my Christian walk. However, I have realized that I need to heal, and give myself permission to do so in my own time and way, even if it means facing disapproval. For now, I am waiting and trusting that with time, and grace, this road will lead to healing in whatever form it comes.

## **Interactions**

In this section, I connect my personal experiences with topics discussed during the interviews.

When asked about how perfectionism impacts their Bible reading, participants shared that they desire to know the perfect truth of scripture. This desire can detract from wanting to read the Bible at all. In my experience, this has been significant. In my own experience I rarely trust myself to know the true meaning of what is said in the Bible for fear of misunderstanding the context. I do not want to chance applying something to my life that can be misinterpreted on any level. I find it difficult to accept not only what I read, but also what others say about the Bible. I regularly question the accuracy of sermons I listen to.

Maleficence presents another concern for me. Throughout history incredible harm has occurred from misinterpretation and misapplication of the Bible. Many churches, families, and relationships, throughout history, have suffered as a result of misinterpretation or misapplication of the Bible. One example of misinterpretation came from a participant who pointed out that people read the translation of Matthew 5:48 that says, “you must therefore be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect” but do not fully understand it (English Standard Version). The participant said this verse was not meant to be read in isolation from grace, but in light of it, so when people are imperfect, grace steps in. However, when the Bible is not read in context, misunderstandings are apt to occur.

Issues, such as the example above, have created such a strong desire within me to know the perfect truth that reading the Bible has become a daunting task. As I have applied more of my perfectionist standards to reading scripture, many of the renewing aspects of the Bible have been cut off. While I do not want to see people harmed by the Bible, I am not sure that my air tight approach to reading it is working either.

Grace was another topic that had similarities between some of the participants and myself. Perfectionism has impacted our ability to accept grace because of the belief that perfection must be achieved in order to deserve it. This opposes the true message of grace and is contradictory to the very nature of grace, because grace is given irrespective of it being earned. My struggle with wanting to be perfect before accepting grace makes me feel spiritually distant from God.

A vivid commonality among most of us was the need to please others. Hearing the participants' reflections helped me see how the need for acceptance and love are foundational elements in perfectionism. I think perfectionism creates the belief that love and acceptance are dependent on how perfect our lives are. That is why it is so important for perfectionists to compensate for shortcomings, or remove them entirely. I have found the need to be perfect causes me to keep others at a distance so that they will not get close enough to see my faults. One of my participants also spoke about that, and for both of us, it is an isolating factor.

In terms of worship, a parallel between two of the participants and myself is that we are drawn to attending Anglican services. We find that we more often connect deeply with liturgical services than with charismatic worship. A possible reason for this could be that the type of structure offered in liturgies is similar to the structure we desire in our

lives because of our perfectionism. Using a different approach to worship will not negate the negative effects of perfectionism, but they may be triggered less often.

One of the most profound learning moments for me during this research came when a participant equated perfectionism to marital affairs. In his/her opinion the potential damage of perfectionism is comparable to having an affair. Perfectionism steals time, energy, and emotional investment from a marriage in a way that is similar to infidelity. This metaphor brought to light the possible depths of ruin from perfectionism, and intensified my understanding of how dangerous perfectionism can be.

I have shared these elements of my journey to supplement the voices of the participants, and to provide context as to why researching this topic has been so important to me. When I reflect on the numerous ways that it has touched my life, the overall experience has been negative. The emotional, mental, physical, relational, and spiritual impact of this struggle has been weighty. My dependence on external approval and the depth of my dislike for myself have been painful. To say that I am extremely grateful to have begun unearthing the root of so much difficulty is an understatement, but to indicate that I have almost worked through it, would be a gross overstatement. The long road of healing lies ahead. The journey continues.

## Summary of Findings

In this chapter, perfectionism is designated according to the two systems outlined in the literature review. One is a polarized system that recognizes perfectionism as being either adaptive, which is positive, or maladaptive, which is negative (Periasamy & Ashby, 2002). The other system views perfectionism as perpetually negative and is subdivided into three categories: Societally-prescribed, self-prescribed, and other-prescribed perfectionism (Antony & Swinson, 2009).

In this section, the two systems have been amalgamated to function as one. Perfectionism is first categorized as either adaptive or maladaptive. When perfectionism is considered to be maladaptive, it is then categorized as societally-prescribed, self-prescribed, or other-prescribed. The purpose of labeling perfectionism in these different ways is to help increase clarity and add depth to the findings present in the research.

At the outset of this research, I only saw perfectionism in a maladaptive light because my personal experience of it has been entirely negative. This changed after hearing the experiences of the participants who have benefited from perfectionism. Adaptive perfectionism is seen in Elvis' life in the ways it establishes an enriching and dependable structure for him to study the Bible. Mary was impacted by the way it gave her the tenacity to remain in her marriage when it was difficult to do so. In both of their journeys, adaptive perfectionism is seen to have cognitive and relational benefits in addition to being positive for their spiritual lives.

On the opposite side of the spectrum are the findings from the participants' experiences with maladaptive perfectionism. Frank's self-prescribed and societally-

prescribed perfectionism perpetuate stagnation in his involvement with humanitarian work. Rather than pushing him to over exert with effort, it causes inaction. This is because he does not want to fall short of the expectations he has for himself as a humanitarian. The other symptom of Frank's self-prescribed perfectionism is that it causes him to feel guilty for not being involved in the work. This shows how the perfectionism pulls him in two directions simultaneously.

Occasionally, the true source behind a motivation is difficult to distinguish. This was seen with Warren as he reflected on whether his experience of solitude was impacted by maladaptive perfectionism or a healthy part of his personality. In the end, he found it was a combination of both. This demonstrates some of the complexity of maladaptive perfectionism as it can easily intertwine and camouflage amongst healthy motivations.

Mary shared her experience of having both maladaptive perfectionism and adaptive perfectionism in the same area of her life. As was mentioned earlier, adaptive perfectionism helped Mary remain in her marriage, while at the same time societally-prescribed perfectionism drove her to overwork. This was not only unhealthy for her marriage but also proved to be negative for her spiritual life.

A commonality between some of the participants and myself is that maladaptive perfectionism can often appear outwardly to be very positive. From an external perspective, people see our accomplishments and celebrate them without knowing the deeper reasons for our aspirations (as was demonstrated in Mary's experience with overworking). A reason for this is that maladaptive perfectionism is often hidden within characteristics that are honoured by society. Some examples are, self control, time

management, strong work ethic, organizational skills, the ability to reach goals, etc. Unfortunately, when these characteristics are motivated by maladaptive perfectionism they are negative (Rice & VanArsdale, 2010). This similarity among our experiences reinforces the inherent subtleties of maladaptive perfectionism.

During the interviews, each participant voluntarily expressed that the overall impact of perfectionism has diminished in their lives. Various influences have either reduced the negative effects of maladaptive perfectionism, or removed them completely. In this inquiry, their experiences show that it is spiritually positive when this happens. The two other similarities amongst the participants are, maladaptive perfectionism causes spiritually negative consequences, and adaptive perfectionism is spiritually beneficial.

These inklings into perfectionism parallel the overall findings of research done by the greater community. As is discussed in the literature review, adaptive perfectionism is positive, while maladaptive perfectionism is negative. These trends are echoed in the experiences of the pastors in this research. The reason there is not a more direct overlap is due to the limited supply of information regarding perfectionism's influence on spiritual well being. In general however, this work reflects the perspectives of the larger body of knowledge.

## Conclusion

I began this research with the question, “How does perfectionism impact the spiritual lives of Pentecostal Pastors in Alberta?” This research uncovered three main themes: first, when maladaptive perfectionism impacts pastors mentally, emotionally, relationally, and/or physically, it is spiritually negative. Secondly, as the effects of negative perfectionism lessen or heal, the results are spiritually beneficial. The third theme is that adaptive perfectionism has the tendency to be spiritually positive. In response to the research question, I believe based on the responses from my participants, that perfectionism does impact the spiritual lives of Pentecostal pastors in Alberta.

I recognize there are certain limitations in this research that impact the scope of the findings. These limitations include, the limited number of participants, the focus centering on only one denomination and one faith perspective, the Canadian culture within which the research occurs, and the biases (stated in the introductory chapter) that I have brought as the researcher. This research is not intended to be a conclusive representation of the impact that perfectionism can have on spirituality.

There are several interesting options for future investigations in this area. These include, looking at this question in relation to a larger population base, assessing whether grace and perfectionism coincide, comparing levels of perfectionism in different faith groups and how it is expressed differently among them. Another area inviting further research would be to question how healing impacts the levels of perfectionism seen in individuals, and deciphering whether the arts have a specific role in bringing about

healing from perfectionism. These ideas, amongst others, are a starting point for gaining a greater understanding of this fascinating subject.

Pentecostal pastors in Alberta face many challenges in their professional and personal lives. My hope is that pastors facing perfectionism can deepen their understanding of this phenomenon from the experiences shared by the courageous participants in this research. This work is a small step towards recognizing the present needs of clergy and working to provide them with better resources. In the future, I hope further research will broaden the scope of support available to pastors in all church settings.

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## Appendix 1

## First Session Questions

1. How do you see your current relationship with God?
2. How do you imagine God 'sees' you?
3. Has perfectionism impacted your prayer life?
4. Has perfectionism impacted how you read or apply the Bible to your life?
5. Has perfectionism impacted your desire for community with other Christian?
6. Has perfectionism impacted your desire to serve in the church?
7. Has perfectionism impacted your experience of solitude?
8. Has perfectionism impacted your family life (specifically marriage life)?
9. Has perfectionism impacted your experience of worship (corporate or private)?
10. Has perfectionism impacted your experience of grace, or acceptance of grace?
11. Are there any other ways perfectionism has impacted you that have not yet been discussed?
12. Has perfectionism ever served you well in your relationship with God? If so, how?
13. Has perfectionism ever been a detriment to your spiritual life? If so, how?
14. Does perfectionism eat away at your spiritual life?

## Appendix 2

### Questions for Second Interview

1. Have there been any thoughts, stories, or significant pieces of information since the first interview that you would like to share?
2. Has this process impacted how you look at your spiritual life?



Appendix 4

Elvis' collage



Appendix 5  
Warren's collage





Appendix 7

Expression of personal struggle with perfectionism

