

Encouragement for Real Life

225 Just Say No to Perfectionism

[00:00:00] Welcome to the Encouragement for Real Life podcast. I'm Julie Lefebure, your host. Life is remarkable, sometimes raw and always real. And some days we could use a little extra encouragement for our real lives. Here you'll find that. Along with personal life impacting stories, helpful life hacks, timely inspiration, biblical insight, and a fresh perspective.

The Encouragement for Real Life Podcast equips you to be a light in this world and to shine bright wherever God has you. I'm glad you're here today.

Julie Lefebure: Well, welcome today to Encouragement for Real Life. When was the last time that you felt this weight of having to get it just right. Or maybe you were striving to prove that you were worthy. Or you were doing all that you could to keep up your [00:01:00] polished persona that you've been working so hard to achieve. You know, I think we can all fall into these kind of traps and it's all so exhausting, isn't it?

Well, today I invite us to just, there's a gnat flying around here. I don't know why, sorry. But today I invite you and the gnat, um, to just take a fresh breath today. And I'm gonna join you in that fresh breath as we continue our Just Say No series this month.

Two weeks ago we looked at just say no to rushing, and last week we explored, just say no to people pleasing. And I pray that both of them encouraged you and just maybe helped you to realize that there's some things in our lives that we don't need to live with anymore.

And today though, we are discussing, something that many of us, I think, struggle with, but [00:02:00] yet we don't wanna talk about and we maybe not even realize we struggle with it and that is perfectionism. That sneaky, relentless pursuit of achieving an often high and unrealistic standard that some of us use to measure our worthiness. But God never wants us to measure ourselves that way.

So we're gonna be looking at how accepting and living in the grace that Jesus gives us is the way to live. Could you use a little more of that in your life? I know I sure could. So if you're ready for this, let's get into this episode.

Julie Lefebure: Have you ever hesitated to start something because you just weren't quite sure that you could do it perfectly? Or have you ever [00:03:00] felt that you just couldn't rest until everything was just right? That you just couldn't put it down? You just had to do one more thing to make it, just to tweak it, to make it perfect?

Well, I have. And last week I was preparing for my third speaking event in 11 days. And in one moment, I was reading through my notes for the, I don't know, the umpteenth time, a sinking feeling came over me. And then my words to myself weren't so kind. I said something like, oh, Julie, this is not good. This is awful. You are going to embarrass yourself. You need to make it better, or you may never be invited back to speak again. Oh, the things we tell ourselves. And you can imagine the pressure and the weight that followed that.

You know, this is a perfect example of [00:04:00] perfectionism. And since I had just prepared for this episode, I recognized it immediately and I stopped what I call my stinking thinking. Here I was so focused on myself and trying to prove that I was capable, that I took my trust in God, the the trust that I have in Him and put it on myself, which it's never supposed to be on myself. It's always supposed to be on God. Because I learned He's the one to put my trust in. And after this realization, I quickly put my focus back on where it needed to be, on Him.

Yeah. Jesus is perfect and I do not need to be. I just need to be obedient to what God is calling me to do. And alls I needed to do was be obedient to do my part, to prepare for this [00:05:00] last and final talk that I was working on. And you know, what happened next? I thought it strange at the time but now I can see why looking back but God led me to ask for prayer. So I shyly shared my request on Instagram and Facebook. I humbly asked for my friends who follow me on those platforms to pray for me. You know, I'm all happy to pray for others, but I usually don't ask for prayer for myself. Are you like that at all?

Sometimes asking for prayer is really humbling and it's opening ourselves up to others. And I realized then that God was teaching me that asking for prayer is actually facing perfectionism. It's actually addressing it. Because you're realizing that you aren't [00:06:00] perfect and you're asking for people to pray for you, to pray for me in my imperfectness. And it's a way to eliminate perfectionism.

This whole thing was a humbling and freeing experience all at the same time. Because I'm still learning that we aren't expected to be flawless. You think I would get it? And maybe you think that too. You think you know by now you're old enough, you should know better. But God just asks us to be faithful. He doesn't expect us to be flawless.

I found a verse that really kind of puts some light in this of what God says and its 2nd Corinthians chapter 12, verse 9 in the New Living Translation. And Paul says this. He said, "Each time he," meaning the Lord, "each time he said, my grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness. So now I am glad to boast about my [00:07:00] weaknesses so that the power of Christ can work through me."

When Paul had begged God to remove the thing that that made him feel weak and vulnerable, and maybe not enough, and maybe it, it was even painful, who knows? But God did not remove it. He revealed it. I caught this. He didn't remove it, He revealed it. He said that my grace is sufficient. Not your strength, not your performance, not your ability to get it right every time.

And Jesus doesn't say, my power is made perfect when you are strong. He says, my power is made perfect in weakness. Weakness is not failure in God's kingdom. It's actually a, a doorway to His divine power. To God's divine [00:08:00] power. What if the very place that you feel insecure right now, the thing that you wish that you could hide or fix, is the, the place that God wants to show His power through you. What if your imperfections are kind of like a, a soil where His, His strength will take root?

You know, we, we don't stop trying, but we stop trying to be God. God's strength is revealed in our weaknesses. Perfectionism tells us that weakness is dangerous. But grace tells us that weakness is holy ground. Perfectionism says, I must not be weak. I cannot show that I'm weak. And Jesus says, bring me your weakness. That's where I move.

Yes, God's strength is revealed in our weakness. Someday [00:09:00] we're gonna understand this and we're gonna live it out. And maybe you're already doing that, and I hope you are. In His faithfulness though, He completes what we cannot finish on our own. In His faithfulness He does that.

And this takes us to another verse, which is, I really appreciate this verse in Philippians. It's Philippians chapter 1 verse 6 in the New Living Translation. And it says, "I am certain that God who began the good work within you will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus

returns." That's so encouraging and so hope-filled, isn't it? That whatever, God, whatever God has began a work in us , He's gonna complete it. He's gonna complete it in us. When we show up faithfully and trust God for the outcome, He gets the glory. We can continue to do what He's calling us to do and in the strength that He [00:10:00] provides, but we don't have to worry about the outcome. Perfectionism says that I must finish this perfectly. But God says I finish what I start. I will finish this.

And there's a big difference between doing things with excellence, which is what we're called to do, and doing things to earn worth or validation or to control outcomes. Excellence flows from love and stewardship of God. Perfectionism, though it, it comes from fear and pressure.

No, we, we don't quit. We don't check out, but we simply stop believing that the world or our worth rests on our flawless performances. We work wholeheartedly. Yes. And we rest deeply in the Lord because God is the one who completes the work in us and through us. It's [00:11:00] not us doing it, my friend. We may think we're doing it, but it's God working through us, when we allow His strength to empower us, the Holy Spirit to empower us. And it's, it's something that we can just trust God in. It's not up to us, it's up to Him. But yes, we show up with excellence.

So where does perfection come from? Are we born with it? Do we learn it? You know, it's often born in, in moments where maybe we didn't feel safe to make mistakes or maybe, um, maybe you had to grow up too fast. Maybe failure wasn't handled with grace. Maybe love felt earned and maybe someone's anger or withdrawal made your heart afraid. Or maybe excellence became your shield. If any of [00:12:00] this describes you and maybe how you're realizing that perfectionism came through one of these instances, I just want you to, to know that I see you and that God sees you. He's not disappointed in you or me. I can see where my perfectionism has come from and I think it's, it's kind of born in the fact that I, I think that maybe my failure wasn't handled with grace. I don't know. I don't know. This has really kind of got me thinking through this episode and I, I pray that it's getting you thinking too, because I think Jesus wants to heal us of a few things.

But , let me back up though and say that, you know, God is not angry at us. He's not disappointed in us, but He's healing us. He's healing us. He's bringing this out to bring healing and wholeness in our lives. So perfectionism, if it took root in these fragile moments when we didn't feel safe to [00:13:00] be small, young, or learning, or even human, then it just makes sense that now we can hold that with grace. We don't have to feel guilty about it. We don't have to feel bad

about it. We can hold it with grace. And over time trying to be perfect, we realize just doesn't protect us. It actually starts to weigh us down. It impacts our peace, our joy, our relationships, and even yes, even our very walk with God.

So let's gently explore the real cost of perfectionism together. What does this cost us? Every single day that we deal with it. Well, perfectionism does hurt us. It makes us center our worth on performance. We are performance based people instead of grace based people. It trades grace for pressure. It confuses excellence with approval seeking. [00:14:00] Um, it also keeps us from starting what God asks us to do. It can make us miss His presence because we are just too preoccupied polishing our presentation. And it can steal our joy and replace it with anxiety. Perfectionism says I must be in control instead of God, I trust You to be in control.

We, we may think that perfectionism is, is faithfulness. You know, it's so faithful for us to be so perfect. But actually it's fear of not being enough. I don't know how or why I allowed it in my life, but perfectionism has affected me over the years. And when I was preparing for this episode, it, it's really come to light that it, it's affected me more than I even probably realized until this episode.[00:15:00]

And maybe you're in the same boat. But, but it just, it didn't just affect me. It also very sneakily burdened the people that I love. I'll never forget the evening, um, this one evening when my then young daughter was crying in her room. When I inquired why, why she was upset um, she shared it was about a certain issue that she felt overwhelmed with. And her words next pierced my heart. I remember them if, if, if they happened two minutes ago. She said, I'm not perfect like you. Yeah. I'm not perfect like you. She said that to me. Her words floored me. Gosh, I did not mean to get emotional here. But she really, really [00:16:00] had no idea how imperfect her mother was. Here my perfectionism that really I didn't realize I was operating under at the time, caused her to believe lies that I never wanted for her.

And it was then as if like scales fell off my eyes and I could see for the very first time that I needed to stop hiding my flaws and allow her to see that her mom was not perfect. And little by little as I did that she then could now understand really who I was. I was not the perfect mom that she thought I was. Oh man. If she only knew. I thought I was the worst mom in the world. I thought I was messing up my kids. I thought, um, you know, why, God, why did You give me these children? Because someone else could probably raise them better. You know? It was just, I felt so, [00:17:00] so unworthy so many

times. But I hid that all from her. But she could finally see who I was. I was flawed, imperfect, and yet still loved by Jesus.

And that's what perfectionism does. It masks all that. It makes us wanna think that we, we can, we can be our own savior almost. When Jesus is the one that He loves us, even when we're not perfect. And I'm so thankful for that experience. Even though it was really painful and hard for me to walk through . But it was God's grace showing me that He had something better for me. He had a different way for me to live and to relate to my children, and I truly believe that was a turning point in my relationship with my kids.

Perfectionism doesn't just rob us of peace. It can rob those around us, too. And isn't it interesting how our lives aren't just about us? So much of what we do and how we live [00:18:00] affects others.

Maybe a pointed question to ask ourselves right now is, who in my life is my perfectionism affecting?

I've been sharing this month reframes from my book Right Now Matters, and, uh, I do this in each episode. And in chapter 12, , this episode is actually titled Not Always About Us. In one part I talk about how Jesus was the perfect example for us to follow in how to live our everyday lives. And if we love Him and follow Him and believe that He is our Savior, the same power present in Him is present in us, because we have the Holy Spirit living inside of us.

We can serve and live and give and stay present and bless others and stop all of the, the perfectionism that we're trying to live under. We can stop all this. Not in our strength, but in His. [00:19:00] When we begin to see what perfectionism costs us, and sometimes even the people around us, we don't respond with shame, we respond with truth.

So as we look to Jesus as our example, and it's not always about us, it's sometimes you know how we are affecting others, let's replace some of the lies that we've believed with God's perspective. One lie of perfectionism is I must not disappoint anyone. And that's kind of comes after pleasing people from last week's episode. But the truth is, is that God is God, not me. I am free to be human. There's such a freedom in that.

Another lie is if I don't hold it together, everything falls apart. The truth is God holds all things together, and that's in Colossians chapter 1, verse 17.

Another lie is my [00:20:00] value is in what I produce. But the actual truth is my value is in who He calls me.

And one more, one more lie. Mistakes make me unworthy or unsafe. The truth is that nothing separates me from His love, and that's Romans chapter 8, 38 and 39. And let's do one more lie. I have to be enough. The truth is that Jesus is enough and I don't have to be. There's such a release in pressure when we believe truth and not lies.

So today, think of one area where you have been trying so hard. One place that you feel so much pressure to perform or get it right and whisper this with me today. Jesus, I give you this place that I am trying to be enough. [00:21:00] And then you can pause and ask Him, what do You want me to know here? What are You trying to tell me here, Lord?

Breaking perfectionism isn't about lowering standards. It's about lifting our eyes to grace, to God's beautiful grace. And there's three practices that that I've come up with that just makes sense to me and maybe they'll make sense to you. Three practices that can help us break the habit of perfectionism.

The first one is to just have a good enough step, to make a good enough step. And that is to allow something to be imperfect this week. Just allow it to be imperfect and don't feel bad about it. That could be, a task that you're trying to do and maybe it didn't work out perfectly. Or, something at work. Or, um I don't know, you left the laundry in too long. I don't know. It could be something. Whatever that thing is for you, just have it be good enough. It doesn't [00:22:00] have to be perfect. Maybe it's a post, a meal, a small task just done without over editing. You just do it and you accept the way it is, and that's okay.

A second practice is a breath prayer. You know, I, I like these breath prayers. You can do it any time and silently or out loud or however. But, um, you can inhale Jesus, You are enough. And exhale and in You, I am enough. Inhale, Jesus, You are enough. And exhale in You, I am enough.

And the third practice is to make a surrender statement. I've been trying to do a little bit better at this. Before beginning a task, just say a surrender statement to God. I offer this to You, Lord. Do what You want with it. I offer this to You, Lord. Do what You want with it. That is empowering and freeing, and it's just, it's a beautiful way that [00:23:00] you can partner with the Lord.

So, which of these three resonate with you the most? Which one do you think you're gonna try first? Right now, instead of performing, let's just receive. Let's

just receive what God has for us today. Yes. 'cause when we are performing, we can't receive.

Our, our son and daughter-in-law gave me a beautiful gift last Christmas. And um, it's a StoryWorth book. I dunno if you've heard of StoryWorth, but it's a service that that helps people record and, and preserve personal stories by you get an email, each week and a question that the, the user fills out. You get one every week for a year. The user fills out and just shares the response, through an email. And then at the end of the year, all of these responses are collected, with stories and photos or whatever you wanna include, and they're compiled into a custom [00:24:00] design keepsake book. Well, I love this idea. And, uh, I'm confessing that I'm behind in my writing. I'm behind in writing my stories, and I have until December 31st to catch up and to finish them. Yeah, I got a lot to do.

But I was sharing this with my sister-in-law a couple weeks ago, along with the stress that I was feeling about it because I don't like being behind. And interestingly, she paid attention to my words and she noticed something that I didn't. She suggested that maybe my perfectionism was stopping me from completing each week's entry. And I didn't wanna admit it, but she hit the nail right on the head. She was absolutely right. She helped me see that deep down, I was thinking that each entry, each memory, each sentence that I was writing had to [00:25:00] be perfect. Because this book would be kind of like my legacy book that I will leave for, for my kids and grandkids and maybe great-grandkids and who knows those who come after me. This book will greatly represent my life. It has my personal stories in it. So I want it to be perfect. And then she, she said that something written is better than nothing written. She was just speaking straight to my heart. Absolutely, yes. You know, sometimes we just get paralyzed because we can't do it if it's not perfect.

But today's a good day just to stop thinking that it had to be perfect. And so when I did that, when I let it go, that it had to be perfect, the weight lifted, and it became a joy again to complete the prompts. And actually the very next day, I finished three stories. I really need to finish one or two, almost every day to catch up. [00:26:00] But it was such a joy to do it instead of a, a panic filled pressure. And sometimes perfectionism just stops us from finishing the things that we know aren't going to be perfect. But some is better than none. And , we can still show up with excellence doing the some. It doesn't have to be perfect.

And you know, I was thinking too, what is perfect anyway? It's relative. What's perfect to you may be something entirely different to me. And so from now on, let's use that practice, the third practice that I just mentioned of saying a

surrender statement before a task. I offer this to you, Lord. Do what you want with it. So simple.

Friend, let's take the pressure off and do the thing that's before us without perfection weighing us down. Friend, you do not have to be flawless to be faithful. You do not have to be [00:27:00] extraordinary to be loved. You do not have to hold everything together. Jesus already holds you. You can rest, you can breathe and you can release it all. And I'm doing this right along with you. You are safe to, to be unfinished in the hands of the One who completes all things and who creates all things.

Friend, if this blessed you today, I invite you to share it with a friend who, who carries this pressure too.

And next week I invite you back. It's our guest episode for the month, and it's one that I don't think you're gonna wanna miss. I'm inviting two special people in my life onto the podcast and they've never been on here before, and it's a conversation that I think that you're really going to enjoy and I think it's going to be very impactful. So it'll drop next Tuesday, so be sure to come back then.

And in the meantime, I invite you to listen to any other [00:28:00] episodes that maybe you've missed in the past that, are just available to encourage you and share these with friends who, or maybe share it on social, social media that you know will impact another. It just gives hope and encouragement to others as well when we do that.

So thank you for being here today. I am praying for you and I am cheering you on. And remember, you do not have to be perfect to be faithful. You do not have to be flawless to be loved by God. You are loved by Him. So let's kick perfectionism to the curb, and live in God's grace.

God bless you.

Thank you so much for joining me here today. You can find more at julielefebure.com. And until next time, stay encouraged.