

4 things that perfection costs us

By [Elizabeth Hagan](#)

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Several years ago I heard a TV special in which actress Jane Fonda said this about life: “We are not meant to be perfect. We are meant to be whole.”

Hearing it was one of those stop-me-in-my-tracks kind of moments. What truth!

I need to say it again: *We are not meant to be perfect. We are meant to be whole people.* And being whole is not about “Bam! Now I’ve got my stuff together” but rather a really long journey. In my faith tradition, we call this spiritual formation.

Yet, how much of our lives do we live striving for perfection?

A diet that starves us. A succession plan at work that enslaves us. And keeping a pristine yard that exhausts us.

And not only this. Some of us won’t go out of our house without our makeup.

We Photoshop our Christmas card photos.

We don’t say what is troubling us in the church prayer request time or even around the table at lunch with girlfriends.

And as a result, sure, we might look good in public and be the envy of others for our wonderful lives. But, perfectionism costs us something. Here are 4 things:

1. We slowly lose the respect of others.

I can smell a fake from 50 feet away, can’t you? I don’t respect (or follow for that matter) people who aren’t telling the truth. Fakers are not those who make it to the top in the very end. Fakers are not the friends you call in the middle of the night. Fakers are not the ones who are cared for in community when life hits its most rocky patches.

2. Our objectivity is gone

In the race toward perfection we begin to “see ourselves more highly than we ought” [as Paul warns against in the book of Romans](#). You know those perfect friends of yours who always have the best plan for how to make their spouses do exactly what they want to do on Friday night, or how to start potty training a child at 18 months old, or who achieve the highest percentage of weight loss in only a month? They are living the lie. And what is worse is they don’t even see it. Sure, there are times when out of the norm things happen that are wonderful, but to be human is to not have your surroundings exactly aligned as if we were in charge of our own universe. We all have bad luck sometimes.

3. A compassionate presence

Those who are in the rat race to be perfect, often don’t have the time for others. They don’t have time to stop and help a co-worker. They don’t have time to consider the recent losses experienced by a friend. They don’t have time to simply sit with a person through long-term crisis. Why? Because all of these things slow a perfectionist seeker down. And not only this, I don’t know how many times that people have said to me as a pastor, “I’d wish I could help ___ who needs help but I can’t. I’m not sure I would know what to say or do.” Perfectionism often paralyzes us from what could be human to human encounters of love.

4. We lose the gift of vulnerability for ourselves!

Brene Brown has become the queen of talks about vulnerability. Her book [The Gift of Imperfection](#) became a national best seller (if that tells you anything about American culture and what we most crave). She says this about vulnerabilities’ gifts for us: “Owning our story can be hard but not nearly as difficult as spending our lives running from it. Embracing our vulnerabilities is risky but not nearly as dangerous as giving up on love and belonging and joy—the experiences that make us the most vulnerable. Only when we are brave enough to explore the darkness will we discover the infinite power of our light.”

Simply put: in perfectionism, we miss out on the possibility of tapping into our own full world-changing potential.

Show more of your warts today!

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