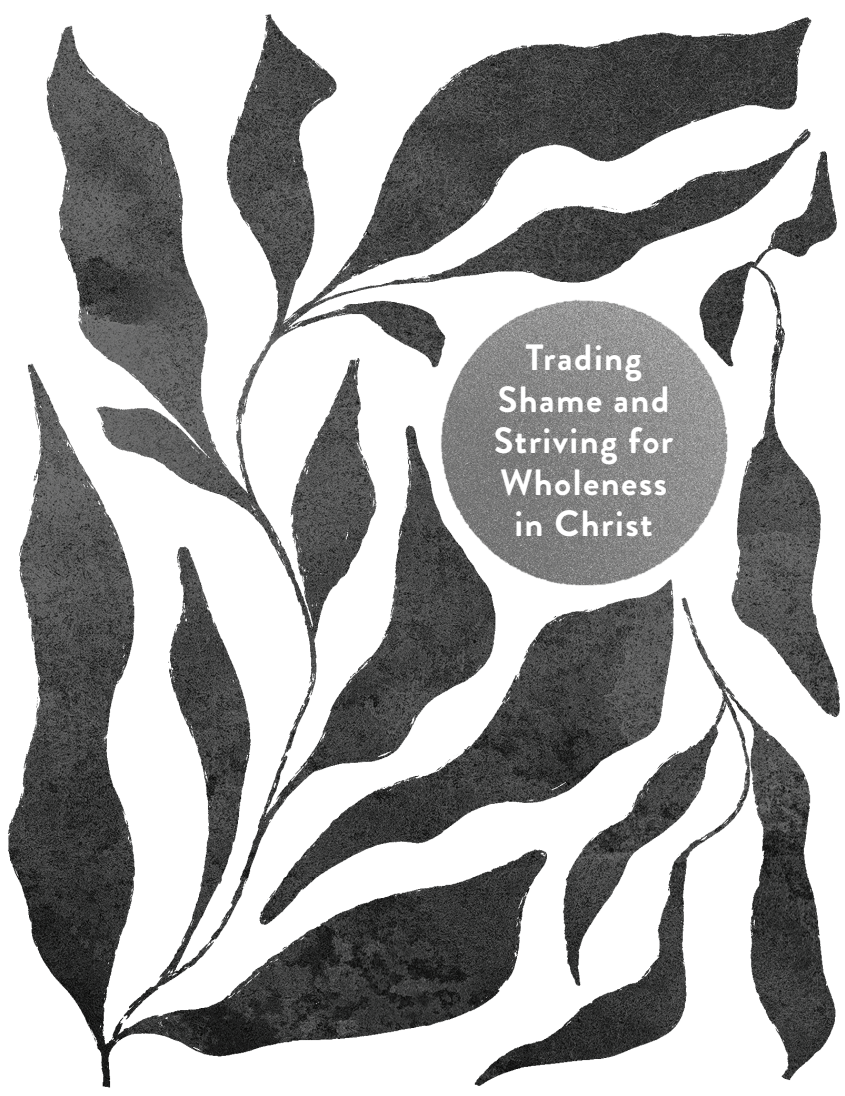
A decorative background of various teal-colored leaves and stems, scattered across the page. The leaves vary in size and shape, some pointing upwards and others downwards, creating a natural, organic feel.

Trading
Shame and
Striving for
Wholeness
in Christ

PERFECTED

BETHANY BRODERICK

PERFECTED



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Printed in the United States of America

979-8-3845-0444-3

Published by B&H Publishing Group
Brentwood, Tennessee

Dewey Decimal Classification: 155.2
Subject Heading: PERFECTIONISM / SELF-
RELIANT LIVING / CHRISTIAN LIFE

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Cover design by Lindy Kasler. Leaf image
by Palina Liashkovich/Stocksy. Watercolor
textures by white snow and Fandorina Liza/
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1 2 3 4 5 6 • 28 27 26 25

To Papa and CeeCee,
Thank you for your legacy as faithful grandparents,
authors, and most important, servants of Christ.

Acknowledgments

To my agent Dan, my editor Mary, and the rest of the team at B&H Publishing, thank you for taking a chance on a new author and guiding me every step of the way. Your insight and feedback made this book better than I could have ever hoped. Thank you for your belief in me and the message of this book.

To Ann and our Writing with Grace Mastermind group, I never would have made it this far without your expertise, your edits, and most important, your encouragement. You all have pushed me to love Christ more through my writing, and I wouldn't be the writer I am today without our group. It is a joy to walk this writing journey alongside each of you.

To the wonderful women at Exhale Creativity: Ashlee, who is the loudest cheerleader and most avid glitter thrower; Sarah, who was so generous to give feedback and to open doors; Sonya and Callie who first helped me realize there was a book inside me and gave me feedback on very early (and quite awful) drafts of the first chapter; and to the many other writers who I now have the privilege to call friends, thank you for creating a safe place for me to learn and grow as a writer.

To my dear friends who read rough drafts along the way: Eileen, Rachael, Amanda, Michelle, Neidy, Anna Clair, and Tara, thank you for your wise feedback and unending encouragement. I could not have gotten through the most difficult days of writing this book without motivating Marco Polo messages from Eileen and texts (with gifs) from Rachael. Your fingerprints are all over this book. Thank you, Staci, for your mentorship and support—and for making sure I didn't accidentally write heresy.

To the local churches that have nurtured and equipped our family. This book is the fruit of seeds planted and watered by faithful sisters and brothers in Christ.

To Papa, my favorite editor, who read every single word of this book multiple times; to my family who has supported me and cheered for me every step of the journey: Dad, Myrissa, Laralyn, and CeeCee; and the biggest thanks to my mom, without whom this book would have never been written. From my earliest memory, you have always encouraged my love for writing and for Jesus. You watched my kids for countless hours while I scribbled on note cards, typed out words, and edited for the millionth time. You were always there to pray for me, to help me work out a chapter, and to remind me of truth when I felt anxious. I'm incredibly thankful to have a family who loves me and loves Jesus. I love you all!

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To my sweet kiddos: Karis, Elias, and Anaya, you are my most precious treasures. Thank you for your grace while I learned to live out these truths as your mother. I pray what I have written in this book will overflow into our home. I love you!

To my husband Joseph, who, after listening to me talk about the book I wish I could read, asked me, “Why don’t you just write the book?” Even though I grumbled back that one does not simply “just” write a book, your confidence in me helped me to move forward in obedience to God’s call on my life. You have been a constant source of strength and wisdom as I prepared my proposal, anxiously sent (and waited on) emails, and spent hours at my desk writing and editing this book. You always believed in me (and what God was doing in me), even when I started to doubt. I love you, Babe; and thank you for being on my team.

Above all, I thank God, who started this good work in me and who will faithfully carry it to completion. Thank you, Jesus, for the rock-solid truth on which I can stand (and write): you have perfected me for all time.

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Introduction

Am I good enough?

This question has plagued my heart and mind in every stage of life. As a child, I followed all the rules, memorized the assigned Bible verses, and sang the loudest in the children's choir—hoping for the nodding approval from my parents and teachers. As a teenager, I led youth group Bible studies, strove for straight A's in school, and counted every calorie entering my mouth out of a deep ache for my peers' acceptance and admiration. As a college student, I pushed through late hours of the night, perfecting a research paper as if my professor's rubric determined my identity. As a newlywed, I made spreadsheets with meal plans and cleaning schedules to be affirmed as a "good Christian wife." As a working woman, I labored over projects long past my paid hours because I felt burdened to prove my worth at my job. As a new mother, I imitated Instagram influencers, feeling like I would never live up to the standards in each tiny square. No matter how much I did, it never seemed to be *enough*.

Maybe you picked up this book because you, too, have felt this way. Perhaps you feel shame because you don't meet the

expectations from those around you, from the voice inside your own head, or from Scripture. You may have strived to work hard, set goals, and discipline yourself, yet you feel like your efforts are still left wanting. When you fall into bed exhausted each night, your mind replays moments from the day like a broken record. You ask yourself: *Was I enough?*

The world tries to answer our self-doubt with glowing affirmations: *You've got this, girl! Just believe in yourself, and you can do it all! You are more than enough, just the way you are!* Even in the church, our struggles with identity are met with true—yet incomplete—promises: *God created you just as you are! You're a beautiful princess! You are enough in his eyes!* Still, all these phrases are merely bandages covering the festering wound of how inadequate we feel. These empty encouragements can never make us feel whole.

So how can we truly know if we are good enough?

What Is Enough?

The world often defines whether we are good enough by our level of education, our financial security, our social media following, or our clothing size. Yet the root of whether we feel good enough goes deeper than outward measures of success.

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Merriam-Webster defines *enough* as “a degree or quantity that satisfies or that is sufficient.”¹

While Scripture doesn't give us a clear definition of the word *enough* as we would use it today, it does provide guidance on where our satisfaction and sufficiency should come from as believers. For example, when writing of his own qualifications as a minister of Christ, Paul describes what makes him confident that he is “enough:”

Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. (2 Cor. 3:4–6 *ESV*)

Paul could have boasted of his spiritual, cultural, and ethnic pedigree to prove his authority to the church in Corinth.² Before he met Christ, Paul was an elite Jew. He followed all the Jewish laws, studied under the right leaders, and worked hard to achieve authority in Jewish culture. He lived according to

1. *Merriam-Webster*, s.v. “enough,” <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/enough>.

2. Philippians 3:4–6

the letter of the law to achieve religious perfection on his own. Yet he found those endeavors were futile—even life-killing. His zeal for man’s approval had even led him to persecute those who followed Christ.

It was only when Paul beheld Christ on the road to Damascus that Paul realized his works would never be enough. When “a light from heaven suddenly flashed around him” (Acts 9:3), it exposed all the hidden darkness within him. Though physically blinded, Paul finally saw the depth of his sinfulness, the perfection of Christ, and the hope of the gospel.

Paul, at last, was free from his self-sufficient striving and self-condemning shame. “Everything that was a gain to me, I have considered to be a loss because of Christ” (Phil. 3:7). Surrendering his own prideful efforts and identity, Paul wanted to “be found in [Christ], not having a righteousness of my own from the law, but one that is through faith in Christ” (v. 9). He could now boast joyfully, not in himself, but in the sufficient goodness of Christ.

Releasing Our Shame and Striving

I resonate with Paul’s life before meeting Christ, zealously pursuing the right things that would make me good enough for my family, my peers, myself, and even God. However, when I defined whether I was “good enough” by my spiritual disciplines, my emotional state, my children’s behavior, and my

career achievements, I was left empty. Centering my identity on my own ability to make myself perfect—to fulfill the letter of God’s law—as Paul wrote, “killed” me.³ I realized I could never make myself whole.

In this book, I share how God, in his grace and kindness, broke through the darkness of my heart. He shone a light on the sin I had tried to keep hidden for so long, but he also revealed the glory of his steadfast love for me. When I stopped trying to earn my own goodness by completing another Bible reading plan, committing to another volunteer opportunity at church, and achieving another career goal, I finally experienced his gift of abundant life. With Paul, I could count all my self-righteous works and shameful mistakes “to be a loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” (Phil. 3:8).

When I at last released my shame and striving, I could finally experience the freedom found in Christ’s satisfaction and sufficiency. And, friend, if God could put together the broken pieces of my life into something whole, I know that he can do the same for you.

Finding Wholeness in Christ

I often have a nagging feeling in my gut that something is not quite right. Sometimes my stomach turns over insignificant

3.2 Corinthians 3:6

worries: *Did I reschedule that doctor appointment? Did I turn off the oven before I left the house? Will I have time today to finish everything on my list?* Other times, my body roils with weightier doubts: *Am I doing a good job as a mother? Did I pass up an opportunity to share the gospel with my neighbor? What if I've missed God's call on my life?*

These anxieties—big and small—add up, often paralyzing me from moving forward. I'm so afraid that I've made a mistake, that I've missed something, that I haven't done enough, and I forfeit the promised peace of Christ. I wrongly believe that the solution to this constant white noise of anxiety is to try harder to be perfect on my own or to cover up my imperfections. I make more lists, plan carefully, and pray that my meager efforts are enough. Yet I know I'll always be found lacking.

Jesus offers something better than white-knuckled perfectionism. He promises that “he has perfected forever those who are sanctified” (Heb. 10:14). Friend, if you are in Christ, he has already *perfected you forever*. This perfection is more than a 4.0 GPA, an impeccable résumé, a tidy home, or a flawless appearance. It's not just an external ideal but an internal peace.

The Greek word translated “perfected” in this verse means “to make complete,” or more specifically, “to add what is yet wanting in order to render a thing full.”⁴ Christ sees where you

4. Strong's, “teleioō,” Blue Letter Bible, *Strong's Greek Lexicon (KJV)*, accessed March 16, 2024, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g5048/kjv/tr/0-1/>.

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are lacking. He knows each imperfection you try to hide behind your shame and striving. He sees your every hidden sin, doubt, and weakness. But rather than heaping on more judgment and expectations, by *his* perfect sacrifice, Christ makes *you* “perfect and complete, lacking in nothing” (James 1:4 ESV). His perfected work in you frees you from anxious striving and fearful shame.

We are enough because he has made us enough. Christ Jesus has graciously filled us with his fullness⁵ so that we may be *whole in him*.

How, then, when you are filled with anxiety about your worthiness and wholeness, can you fight the lies that tell you you’re not enough with the truth that Christ has *perfected* you?

Fighting the Lies with Truth

Every time I share my testimony of struggling with shame, anxiety, perfectionism, legalism, and more, I hear a resounding echo of “me too.” I’m encouraged to know I’m not the only one who wonders if she’s enough. However, I’m also grieved because I’m not the only one Satan has deceived into a false sense of shame and striving.

How has our culture’s emphasis on self-improvement manifested as legalism within the church? How has the

5. John 1:16

often-celebrated personality trait of perfectionism evolved into works-based righteousness? How have we become so focused on personal goodness that we've missed out on the goodness of God? Why do we cling to our shame as if we are people without hope? I hope to answer these questions, and more, in this book, so that you and I can, "demolish arguments and every proud thing that is raised up against the knowledge of God, [as] we take every thought captive to obey Christ" (2 Cor. 10:4-5).

Maybe you're like me, and you've pursued a self-righteous religious résumé yet have never felt good enough for God. Or maybe you're burdened with self-condemnation over the weight of your past sins, wondering how you could ever be good enough moving forward. I've been there too, friend. Neither way can make you feel whole. This book has good news for both the self-condemning and the self-righteous. It's my story, and probably some of your story. But mostly, it's the story of how Christ frees us from our shame and striving. It's the story of how Christ took our imperfections and perfected us. It's the story of how he can make us whole in him.

The question that will truly liberate us is not whether we are enough, but whether we believe that *Christ* is enough.

Walking Freely in Christ's Perfection

I pray as you read this book, we can together name Satan's lies that have held us captive, fight those lies with the truth of

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God's Word, and walk freely in God's promises. I hope we can release our own striving for goodness and our shame that we are not good enough, and instead, we will hold fast to the perfect goodness of Christ.

Throughout this book, I'll use parts of my story along with the pastoral exhortations from Hebrews 10 to guide our journey to find our wholeness in Christ. In part 1, we'll dig up the root of the problem: putting obedience of God's law above enjoyment of God's love. We'll consider how our "do-it-yourself" culture has led to widespread "self-made religion" in the modern church (Col. 2:23).

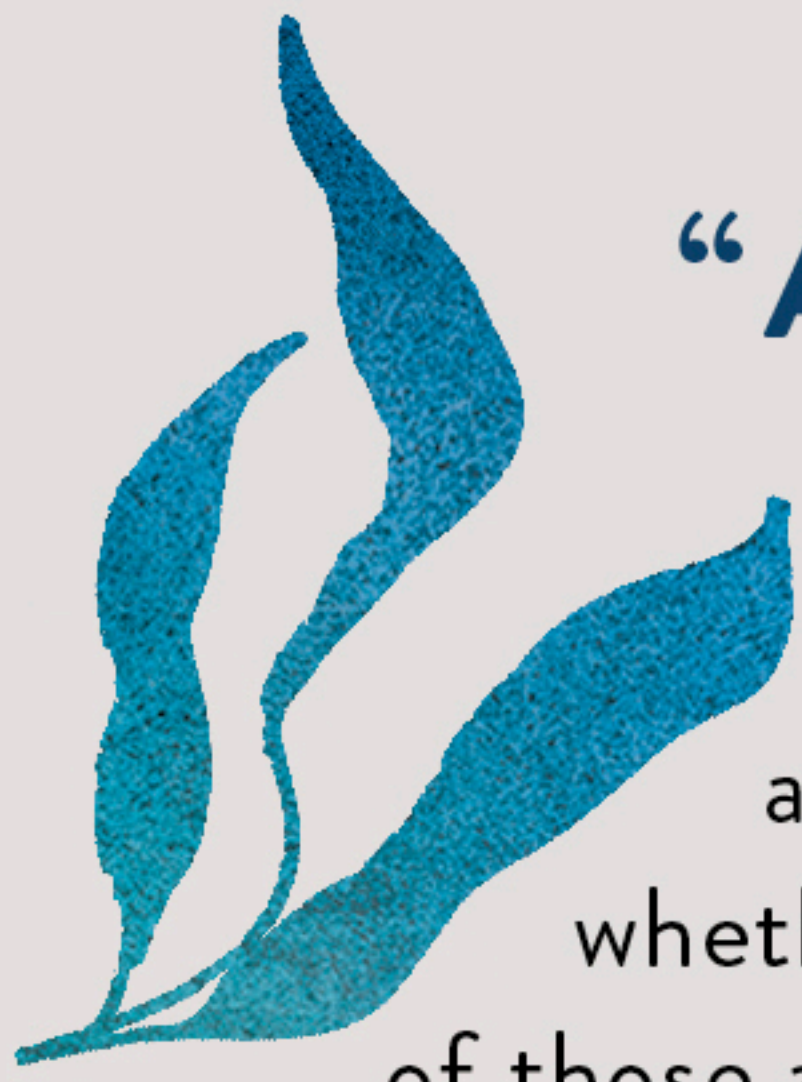
In part 2, we will renew our minds with the biblical truth about God, ourselves, and our salvation. We'll expose the falsehoods in our view of God and learn how he's revealed himself as compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in faithful love. We'll explore how God made us: created in his good image, with good limits, and called to good work. Then, we'll rejoice in Christ's work in us: how he has perfected us, is perfecting us, and will make us perfect forever.

Finally, in part 3, we'll discover the glorious promises of resting in Christ's finished work on our behalf: assurance of faith, enduring hope, love-motivated good works, and biblical community. At the end of each chapter, I'll offer you a "better affirmation"—a solid truth from God's Word to which you can cling rather than the empty encouragements of this world. I'll

also include some reflection questions and journaling prompts to help you process what God may be teaching you through this book.

Today, if you feel heavy-laden by your vain efforts for sufficiency and satisfaction, I invite you to surrender your burdens at the foot of the cross. Lay down your guilt for all the imperfections and sins that weigh you down. We can bring our weary hearts to our good, gentle, and lowly Savior, “for [his] yoke is easy and [his] burden is light” (Matt. 11:30). Only when we take his yoke upon us will we find rest for our souls.

Only when we release our shame and our striving can we enjoy wholeness in Christ.



“AM I GOOD ENOUGH?”

The question plagued Bethany’s heart and mind as she drifted off to sleep each night. She worried whether her meager efforts had met the expectations of those around her, the ones in her own head, and (more importantly) the ones she felt from God.

Culture answered her question with glowing affirmations: You’ve got this girl! Just believe in yourself! You are more than enough, just the way you are! Even in the church, her struggles with insufficiency and insecurity were met with true yet incomplete promises: He created you just as you are! You’re a princess in his eyes! You are enough for him! All these phrases were merely bandages covering the festering wound of how inadequate she felt.

How could she truly know if she was good enough?

Through biblical teaching alongside her own personal struggles with perfectionism and condemnation, Bethany shares how she learned to lay down her efforts to be good enough by trusting that Christ is enough for her.

Perfected replaces the burdensome expectations and empty affirmations of this world with the truth that Christ has perfected you for all time. You can find freedom from your self-sufficient striving and rest in the finished work of Christ on your behalf.

BETHANY BRODERICK is an author, speaker, and professor who has written for *The Gospel Coalition*, *Risen Motherhood*, *JourneyWomen*, *Christian Parenting*, and more. She lives in Birmingham, Alabama, with her husband and three young children.



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