

The Heart of Perfection:
Questions for Individual or Group Reflection
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Chapter One: An Ancient Lie

1. Colleen always thought perfectionism was “someone else’s problem.” What’s your image of a perfectionist? Has reading this chapter changed that image? Are there areas of your life where you struggle with control, comparison, or impossible expectations?
2. Colleen speaks of a critical inner voice that she found herself questioning for the first time while rushing her injured toddler to the emergency room. Do you ever hear that voice? When is it loudest? How can you distinguish it from the voice of God?
3. One reason many of us are reluctant to change our perfectionist ways is that we fear becoming spiritually lazy. Colleen says the lives of the saints prove that surrendering perfectionism is a key step toward holiness, not a detour. Do you equate holiness with flawlessness? When you picture a holy person, what do you see? Does that picture change if you think of the saints as recovering perfectionists?

Chapter Two: The Struggle for Gentleness

1. With the help of Francis de Sales, Jane de Chantal realized that her harshness and impatience with others were driven by the flawlessness she thought God expected of her, and only when she practiced patience with herself could she extend it to others. Have you seen that cycle in your life? How can you be gentler with yourself in tough times?
2. Colleen describes harshness and hurry as closely connected in her life as a perfectionist, and sees a link between her desire to please or impress others and her compulsion to rush. Is hurry a dominant force in your life? Are there places in your daily schedule where you can slow down or opt out for the sake of preserving your peace and cultivating patience?
3. Colleen speaks of showing gentleness to all who came before her, even relatives who passed their perfectionist attitudes and habits on to her. Do you see any signs of perfectionism in your family tree? How can you reject perfectionist attitudes while still loving and learning from those who instilled them—and who may still hold them?

Chapter Three: Stalking Joy

1. Angélique Arnauld is the only heretic who gets her own chapter in *The Heart of Perfection*. What’s the value of studying the life of an un-recovered perfectionist like Angélique? Do you see anything of yourself in her personality or temptations?
2. Jansenism is a heresy that was officially condemned centuries ago. Yet the temptation to take an overly grim view of God and our fellow Christians is present in every age. How do you see it infecting the Body of Christ today? How can you personally respond?
3. Colleen’s closing story of reluctantly joining a boisterous closing dance at an unconventional Mass in Spain suggests that spiritual joy finds us at surprising times. Have you had an experience of finding joy among people or in places where you least expected it? What are some concrete ways you can choose joy in your life today?

Chapter Four: Braving the Waves

1. Alphonsus Liguori modeled his image of God on his harsh and authoritarian father, and only found relief from his excessive fear of God by meditating on Scripture passages

about God's unconditional love. Where does your image of the Heavenly Father come from? Does it square with Christ's description of God the Father in the Gospels?

2. While "scrupulosity" is a term we rarely hear these days, many Christians still suffer from obsessive guilt or anxiety over minor flaws and already-confessed sins. Do you ever see this tendency in yourself? Do you truly believe that God is *for* you (Rom. 8:31)? How might taking that truth to heart change the way you react to your mistakes?
3. In trying to take more risks for God, Colleen describes seeking counsel from "Spirit-filled, prayerful people whose lives prove their willingness to radically trust God, and tuning out those who always make me feel silly or stupid or bad or wrong." Where do you turn for advice when mulling a risk? Are there any voices in your life you should listen to more often—or less? Which drives more of your decisions: fear or faith?

Chapter Five: The War Within

1. In opening this chapter, Colleen describes the conclusions she jumped to while overhearing her baby cry during her speech to a women's conference, and her discovery minutes later that the situation wasn't as dire as she thought. Have you ever felt intensely discouraged when setting out to do something important for God, only to later see obstacles melt away? What did that experience teach you about God's providence? How would you respond differently today, knowing how things turned out in the end?
2. The sickbed conversion of Ignatius of Loyola began when he noticed how he felt after reading spiritual books as opposed to worldly ones. Have you ever noticed how the materials you read, look at, and listen to affect your peace of soul? What changes in your life and your media consumption habits might be warranted based on your observations?
3. A false consolation diverted Colleen from prayer and kept her up too late to do important work the next day. Have you ever fallen prey to an "angel of light" (2 Cor. 11:14), an apparent good that turned out to be a distraction from God's will? How might you use Ignatian discernment rules to spot the next one before it gets the better of you?

Chapter Six: A Passionate Balance

1. An admitted workaholic, Colleen once saw balance as incompatible with excellence. Benedict's Rule changed her mind, showing her how respect for our limits liberates us to achieve what matters most to God. How has your view of balance changed through the years? Your view of excellence? Which achievements matter most to you today?
2. Benedict's Rule comes down hard on those who work past quitting time, skip prayer, or arrive late to meals. "There's a fine line between work that glorifies God and work that merely glorifies ourselves," Colleen writes, and "Benedict saw our willingness to drop our work when a more pressing need arises as a good indicator of whether or not we've crossed that line." How do you respond to disruptions of your work or routine? Where does prayer rank among your daily priorities? How might your answers change if God's glory—not success or productivity—were your top concern each day?
3. Colleen says she's realized that she cannot "have it all—no woman can, whether she works outside the home or not—because all is God's domain, not ours. My all will come in heaven." How does your view of the limits and tradeoffs of your life change when you think of this life not as your final destination but as your flawed-yet-beautiful path to a place of eternal happiness where "God may be all in all" (1 Cor. 15:28)? Is it disappointing to surrender the dream of having it all on earth? Or liberating? Why?

Chapter Seven: Pilgrims and Strangers

1. Colleen's visit to a once-stunning, now-rundown childhood home made her realize how quickly the world's glory fades. Have you ever had this realization after returning to a favorite place, bumping into an old acquaintance, or hearing news of a former workplace or hangout? What does that suggest about what you should pay attention to now?
2. While the conversion of Francis of Assisi is widely known, many don't realize that it unfolded gradually, through a series of grace-based decisions Francis made to follow Christ despite the social costs. Do you see this gradual progression toward a more radical way of following Jesus in your life? What has it cost you? Would you do it again?
3. Francis and Junípero Serra both traveled light on their missionary journeys, believing that they couldn't imitate and serve Jesus freely while hauling excess baggage—physical, emotional, or otherwise. Is there baggage in your life right now—stuff, status, worries, resentments, or regrets—that Jesus is asking you to leave behind? How might you apply Serra's motto of "Always forward, never back" in your life today?

Chapter Eight: From Head to Heart

1. Colleen never thought the Sacred Heart of Jesus had much to say to her until she began researching its impact on the recovering perfectionist saints. Were you surprised by the biblical and patristic roots of this ancient devotion? Why do you think God revealed His heart as one wounded on the Cross, rather than as steely and invulnerable? What does that say about how God looks at and works through the wounds in your heart and life?
2. Thérèse of Lisieux graciously tolerated slights from her fellow nuns for love of God, though an onlooker could have mistaken her forbearance for cowardice. Do you struggle to distinguish between a godly desire to forgive and an unhealthy craving to avoid conflict? Is there a different feeling in your heart depending on which of those motives is driving you? Can choosing peace over confrontation ever be more courageous?
3. Near the close of the book, Colleen says this of the saints: "It seems crazy to live like them, crazy to open my heart so wide to God's love that any lunatic could come trample on it." Yet she also sees an upside to surrendering her self-protective impulses: "While the pursuit of worldly perfection is miserable and grueling even when you seem close to pulling it off, the path of love is littered with rewards along the way." Have you experienced any of those rewards on this journey toward freedom from perfectionism? What others still await you? What next step is Jesus asking you to take to draw nearer to His heart and His call to Gospel perfection? Is freedom in Christ worth the risk?