THE ORGANIZED HEART

A Woman’s Guide to Conquering Chaos

Staci Eastin
Cruciform Press | Released March, 2011

For Todd, who knows my faults and loves me anyway. And for Adam, Elise, and Jacob. May you always rest in the grace of our perfect Savior.

– Staci Eastin

© 2011 by Staci Eastin. All rights reserved.
CruciformPress.com | info@CruciformPress.com
“Staci Eastin packs a punch with this short book. But it’s a gracious punch, full of insights about our disorganized hearts and lives, which is immediately followed by the balm of gospel-shaped hopes. *The Organized Heart* is ideally crafted for use with accountability partners and small groups. Because of the Holy Spirit’s active presence, there is always hope for change. Open this book with that great truth in mind and you’ll find much to ponder!”

Carolyn McCulley, fellow procrastinator, is a blogger, filmmaker, and the author of *Radical Womanhood* and *Did I Kiss Marriage Goodbye?*

“Unless we understand the spiritual dimension of productivity, all our techniques will ultimately backfire. In this book, Staci Eastin has provided that all-important spiritual perspective. Instead of adding new rules, she explains how to keep leisure, busyness, perfectionism, and possessions from becoming idols. Encouraging and uplifting rather than guilt-driven, this inside-out approach can help women who want to be more organized but know that adding another method is not enough.”

Matt Perman, Director of Strategy at Desiring God, blogger at whatsbestnext.com, and author of the forthcoming book, *What’s Best Next: How the Gospel Transforms the Way You Get Things Done*

“Organizing a home can be an insurmountable challenge for a woman. *The Organized Heart* makes a unique connection between idols of the heart and the ability to run a well-managed home. This is not a how-to; instead, Eastin looks at sin as the root problem of disorganization, and strives to help the reader understand biblically how to overcome this problem. She offers a fresh new approach and one I recommend, especially to those of us who have tried all the other self-help models and failed.”

Aileen Challies, Mom of three, and wife of blogger, author, and pastor Tim Challies
# Table of Contents

## Chapters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>Our Story</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two</td>
<td>Perfectionism</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three</td>
<td>Busyness</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four</td>
<td>Possessions</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five</td>
<td>Leisure</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six</td>
<td>Difficult Circumstances</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seven</td>
<td>Where to Begin</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources Cited ................................ 104  
About Cruciform Press ..................... 105
Just two days before Christmas, and I was terribly behind. We expected to leave town in thirty minutes and I had just started packing. Todd, my husband, went to get gas, hoping that by dividing the chores we could still get away on time. Meanwhile, I frantically dug through baskets of clean laundry, hoping to find enough matching pairs of socks to see my preschool-age son through the week. Each glance at the clock revealed that I would not finish in time.

I began a mental list of all the reasons I wasn’t ready. I don’t remember now what they were, but I’m sure I drew from the stock of excuses I always used: unexpected events, needy children, unreasonable demands from others. But as Todd returned, conviction washed over me. None of my excuses were lies, but I wasn’t being completely honest. Because while my week had brought a few surprises, I had still managed to find time for plenty of other things—less important things.
When Todd returned home and walked into our bedroom, I looked him in the eye and told him the truth. I was running late because I hadn’t prepared. It was all my fault.

I must have eventually finished packing, because we did make it to our parents’ homes for Christmas that year. And Todd, who has always been incredibly patient with my slapdash housekeeping, spent the rest of his vacation cheerfully helping me return the house to order.

I wish I could say that my story of holiday chaos was just that—a season, and an unrepeated one—but I can’t. One year later I was running errands and half-listening to a Christian radio program about New Year’s Resolutions. Listeners called in and listed the changes they wanted to make in the coming year: lose weight, quit smoking, spend more time with their families. At each stoplight I glanced at my to-do list, checking off anything recently accomplished, but also adding new tasks as they occurred to me. As the uncompleted items piled up faster than the completed ones, I once again felt the pressure of too much to do and too little time to do it in. Suddenly I heard the host ask the radio audience to think of our own resolutions, and I tearfully whispered, “I want to be more organized.”

You may think I was being too hard on myself. Christmas is a busy time, and it’s only normal to feel
stressed and rushed then. But that season simply placed a spotlight on a constant reality. My problem with disorganization seemed more apparent during Christmas, but the problem was always there. In fact, my entire adult life could be described as a series of unfinished good intentions: notes and cards never sent (or even bought), dinner parties never thrown, kind words never spoken, calls never made, help never given.

So I come to you as someone who must fight to stay organized every day of her life.

**In Pursuit of an Organized Home**

My mother and my grandmothers were industrious women who showed me that organization is possible. They managed to keep clean houses, work, volunteer, and still have ample time for family, rest, and leisure. In an effort to be more like them, I have read countless books on home organization, and I own more planners than any person could ever need. I’ve tried lists, notebooks, note cards, and filing systems; I’ve posted schedules and spreadsheets; I’ve bought drawer organizers and closet systems. While all these things helped for a time, none brought the lasting change that I sought.

The systems, after all, require implementation, but my disorganized heart can corrupt a perfect rule
and refuse a generous teacher. I can shove unfolded T-shirts into beautiful closet shelves or justify fudging on a sensible daily schedule. But the systems I tried don’t get to the heart of why I do that. Most of these books and tools assume that disorganization stems from lack of skill. If I would just follow a certain system, I could enjoy a life of organized bliss. I could float through my spotless house, sail to all my appointments on time, and never feel stressed or rushed again.

Other books blamed my disorganization on childhood traumas or family dysfunctions. Surely my parents had loved me too little (or too much), had praised me too little (or too much), or had disciplined me too little (or too much). If none of those things applied, perhaps I had a chemical or hormonal imbalance. Regardless of the cause, it certainly wasn’t my fault.

Other books tried to tell me how lucky I was to have a house to clean. Housekeeping could be such fun; I just didn’t know it yet.

I’ve come to see my disorganization as not due to a lack of skill or knowledge. I know how to keep a home, as I watched that done well all through my growing-up years. And since I already lacked the self-discipline to organize the tasks I knew needed doing anyway, the additional task of filling out a chart or planner just became one more thing to
distract me from my priorities. Failing the system seemed inevitable.

Pop psychology didn’t help either. Blessed with a happy childhood and loving parents, I can’t blame anyone else for my failures: I know my parents taught me better. Nor could I blame any physical problem, for I am in the best of health, and I’ve always managed to find lots of time, energy, and ability to complete tasks I want to complete.

As for housekeeping being fun? Some of my friends like to vacuum and others enjoy ironing. I have one friend who thinks cleaning out a closet is a fun way to spend a free afternoon (I worry about her). I’ve always taken great satisfaction in dusting—as long as I don’t have to clear clutter beforehand. Pleasure in housekeeping seems subjective, then. It is a necessary task, and some enjoy some pieces of it but simply do the rest. Just as we have different abilities and talents, we will always find some tasks more interesting than others. Why cleaning the toilets must be *fun* is beyond me, but they still must be cleaned, and organizing my days so that such tasks can be accomplished is important.

So the real question is *why* I don’t organize my days to do what I believe is important and what I do, in fact, have the skills and training to do. The answer is that I have a motivation problem. I *do* what I do not want to do—and I do *not* do what I want to do.
In Pursuit of an Organized Heart

Naturally organized people gain satisfaction from getting their work done quickly without procrastinating. They have learned to budget their time so that they don’t take on more commitments than they can handle. They can easily whittle down their possessions to fit the amount of storage in their homes. When unexpected things come up, they prioritize between the urgent and non-urgent.

And then there is the rest of us. We know we shouldn’t put required tasks off until the last minute, but something more pressing (or more fun) always seems to come up first. We know we shouldn’t take on yet another commitment, but everything seems so important, and we don’t want to let anyone down. Our closets, drawers, and garages overflow with extra stuff, but when we try to clean out, we can’t part with any pieces. Some of us may even have spotless homes, but we’re exhausted. We feel like we work all the time without any free time to relax and enjoy life the way other people do.

Secular psychologists tell us that we do these things because in our minds the payoff for disorganization is greater than the benefit of organization. We procrastinate because we don’t want to do what needs to be done now. We overcommit because saying No hurts. We gain excess possessions because
we prefer the certainty of having too much to the possibility of not having enough. We seek perfection because contentment feels like compromise. In other words, despite the fact that our lives are spinning out of control, in our twisted minds we believe that living this way is more pleasurable than taking steps to fix the problem.

I think those psychologists are partly right. The disorganization in my life was not due to lack of knowledge or skill and it was not due to a problem in my childhood. Rather, it’s a broken belief system: a heart issue, a sin issue. At the end of the day, it’s idolatry.

That may sound awfully harsh. You want this book to help you organize your life, not lay more guilt and shame at your feet. Being disorganized may be unhandy, but it’s just your personality, right? It’s certainly not a sin.

Or is it? Disorganization steals your joy. It causes you to go through your life frazzled and stressed. It causes friction with your husband and makes you snap at your children. It makes you perform ministry tasks grudgingly. It prevents you from developing friendships, because you’re always rushing from one task to the next. You don’t feel like you’re doing anything well, let alone to the glory of God.

The Bible is clear that as Christians, we have tasks appointed to us by God (Ephesians 2:9-10).
We should do everything we do with all our heart because we do it for the Lord (Colossians 3:23). As women, we are instructed to care for our homes and families (Titus 2:3-5). Whether we want to refer to our disorganization as personality quirks or sin, we must fight against anything that interferes with our relationship with God.

We never conquer sin by adding more rules. That’s what the Pharisees did, and Jesus chastised them for it. Jesus is interested in more than just outward works; he wants us to perform good works from the overflow of a loving and pure heart. My attempts to get organized always failed because I tried to change my habits without letting the Holy Spirit change my heart. It was only when I saw the sinful motivations behind my bad habits that I could see lasting change in my life.

**Starting to Start the Pursuit: Naming the Idols**

This book will be different than any other book on organization that you’ve probably read. I have no schedule to offer you, I won’t tell you what day to mop the kitchen floor, and you don’t need to buy a timer. Your standards for an organized home and a reasonable schedule will vary with your personality, season of life, and the needs and preferences of your family.
Our Story

What I hope to do is to help you examine your heart and discover things that may be hindering your walk with God. My goal is not necessarily for you to have a cleaner home or a more manageable schedule—although I certainly hope that is the case. Rather, my hope for this book is that it will help you serve God and your family more effectively, more fruitfully, and with greater peace and joy.

I can’t promise that the change will be instant or total. The salvation we receive when we accept Jesus as our savior is instant and total, but sanctification—the process of becoming holy, or more like Christ—is a lifelong process. Christ’s death on the cross saves us from the penalty of sin, but we still have a sinful nature that we must battle daily. We shouldn’t fall under the impression that holiness will automatically come to us while we sit and watch television. Holiness is something we must strive for (Hebrews 12:14), and we must start in the heart. Identifying the heart issues behind your disorganization will enable you to repent of them. Through the strength of the Holy Spirit, you can rid yourself of these idols (Romans 8:13).

It’s unfashionable these days to talk about sin, and it’s even less fashionable to talk about idolatry. The world likes to tell us that we’re beyond that now. When we honestly discuss the sinful attitudes behind our actions, we are often shushed: “You’re not that
bad! Everyone does those things! You need to have better self esteem!”

But the human heart is the same now as it was in biblical times. We don’t have to bow down to a golden statue to worship idols. When we trust in anything other than God for peace and happiness we are essentially practicing idolatry. Only when we see the idols yet in our hearts can we truly “put off the old self” and “put on the new self” (Colossians 3:5-10).

In this book, I have identified four idols that seem to particularly hinder women from serving God effectively. They are leisure, busyness, perfectionism, and possessions. You may find that you only struggle with one or two, or you may discover that your problems have their roots in all four. I will examine all of them so that you, by the grace of God, can identify where your weaknesses lie, and begin to experience a more joyful walk with the Lord.

**Explore**

1. I’m going to step out on a limb and assume that if you are reading this book, you struggle with staying organized. Which of these areas describe your problem (more than one may apply):
Lack of knowledge (not knowing what to do)
Lack of skill (not knowing how to do it)
Lack of action (just not doing it)

2. In Romans 7:18–20, Paul discusses his desire to do what is right, coupled with his apparent inability to carry that out. What does he say is the cause of this struggle? Where do you see the same struggle in your own life?

3. We tend to think of idols as items or statues that we physically bow before. In Colossians 3:5, what does Paul call idolatry? What’s similar between the idols in that list and a physical statue?
In March 2009, the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* featured the sale of a 1950s-era home in The Hill neighborhood of St. Louis. From the outside, the frame-style track house appears unexceptional, similar to many other houses found in that part of the city. What made this home so extraordinary was its interior.

The house, which the adult children who grew up there were selling, was in pristine condition, completely unaltered since their parents had purchased it in 1956. Everything from the carpets to the furniture and even the appliances was virtually unused.

Throughout the decades they had lived there, the family spent their time in the basement: they cooked, played, ate their meals, and conducted the rest of daily living surrounded by the basement’s concrete floors and exposed ceilings. The boys only went upstairs to sleep in their beds at night and bathe in the bathtub in the winter. The upstairs stove was used
28 times – each year at Thanksgiving. Anytime the family ventured upstairs, they carefully stepped on throw rugs laid out to save the carpet. The furniture was covered in plastic.

**The Importance of Excellence**

What would you think if you entered such a house? Would you admire the spotless carpet and sparkling kitchen? If you didn’t know the price the family paid to keep it that way, would you be tempted to strive for the same standard?

We should aim for excellence in all we do. The goal of perfection has lead to many great achievements in the world of art, athletics, and technology. Physicians, airline pilots, and bridge designers, for example, need to be as close as possible to perfect in their work.

More importantly, Colossians admonishes us to do all our work well, because we’re really working for God, not men. That includes all our daily tasks, even those that might not require the same degree of precision as the architect designing a skyscraper. Whether caring for your home and family or working a 9-to-5 job, whatever we do is important and worthy of our best efforts.

Sometimes, though, our goals go beyond striving for excellence. We do not see ourselves as stewards of talents and tasks that God has given us so much as
superwomen who must achieve the highest standard or else fail as humans. So the noble goal of working diligently takes a subtle turn. Instead of giving our all and trusting God for the results, we shoot for an impossible goal: perfection.

**The Problems with Perfectionism**

Perfectionism in its purest form wants the best for God and others. We usually consider it a good thing. In fact, the word “perfectionist” conjures up ideas of someone who does her work well and takes the time to care for important details. But in this chapter, I mean “perfectionism” as that sinful preoccupation with appearances that blinds us to the importance of God’s grace and glory.

The other chapters in this book address heart issues that lead to outward chaos: people can quickly spot a messy, cluttered home or an unworkable schedule. But perfectionism is chaos turned inward. The visible life of the perfectionist may seem ideal, but that carefully maintained façade hides a frenzied and wrongly motivated heart.

While excellence is a noble goal, perfectionism as I mean it here is a form of bondage. Instead of making us excited and hopeful, it leaves us irritable and cross. Perfectionists can drown in a sea of details, stressing out over the minutiae of life and missing
moments of joy. Perfectionists rarely get the luxury of resting in a job well done, ruminating instead on the minor flaws that spoil their idealistic plans.

Fear of those minor flaws can therefore paralyze perfectionists, making them incapable of any action. If we don’t have the time or energy to perform a task to our exacting standards, we may not do it at all. Or if we cannot see that the end result will be just right, we do not even take a first step.

It can be hard to spend time with perfectionists. Friends and family feel pressure to live up to impossible standards, or they feel frustrated by slow action. The perfectionist’s wish to control every detail of her environment can strain relationships, often hurting those she loves the most. Thus, we must not take pride in perfectionism, nor provide it as a sanctified excuse for inaction. Rather, we must fight against perfectionism as we aim to become more like Christ.

**Perfectionism and Idolatry**

If we were honest, we would say that at least sometimes we pursue perfection because we want others—maybe even God—to think well of us and our abilities. In our hearts at those moments, appearances and praise of man are ultimately important, or else we think we must make ourselves worthy of God’s love. This means that perfectionism has become an idol. Rather than trusting in God to
Perfectionism

enable us to perform the tasks we must do, we rely on our own power. Instead of finding our joy in following Christ, we scramble to acquire the praise of others. Rather than trusting in God’s grace, we foolishly try to earn God’s love.

Wanting to do our best for a holy God is a good thing, but aiming for perfection to earn God’s favor is not. Perfectionism becomes idolatry when we believe that the quality of our work makes us worthy of God’s praise. That is trying to find salvation in what we do, not in what Christ has already done for us.

We should give our all, but we should do so while resting in the knowledge that God esteems us because of Christ’s work on the cross, not because of any actions of our own. We bring glory to God when we serve him, but we don’t make our salvation more secure when we do something well. The idol of perfectionism therefore competes with the most important desires of our hearts—do we take our ultimate pleasure in who Jesus is and what he has done for us, or do we strive to void his work on the cross because we want to earn our own glory with our own perfection?

Pride in Reputation
Some perfectionists are primarily motivated by how others perceive them. We desperately want to show
others our best self and will go to heroic lengths to do so. This goes beyond the desire to maintain a good witness to the world. When we truly want to witness to others, we walk alongside them to show them a better way. We reveal the gospel, which means seeing our great weakness in light of God’s sufficient strength. To pretend that our lives can be perfect without the gospel applied deeply and constantly to our hearts is self-righteousness.

It’s also unloving, because perfectionism doesn’t give: it takes. Instead of working to help others become their best, perfectionists work to gain admiration from others. Instead of pointing others to worship a holy God, we turn the spotlight on our own achievements.

This striving to capture the good opinion of others shows what is really on the throne of our hearts. We cannot serve two masters. When we derive our peace and joy from the praise and admiration of others, it is idolatry. We are not serving God, but our own perceptions of what impresses other people. Our joy and peace do not rest in God and his love, but in receiving the approval of man.

**Pride in Talents**

God gives all of us gifts with which to serve the church and the world. Some of these are talents that we can develop through natural means, and
Perfectionism

which we may be tempted to use for our own glory. Consider a musical talent, for example. Music is a gift from God, and it has always had an important place in our worship services. Some people have abundant musical talent, so they can sing or play difficult pieces with little preparation. Others must work harder, practicing for weeks to reach the same level of proficiency.

The ability to do well with little practice should humble you because that great blessing comes only from the hand of a gracious God. Similarly, if you need to practice more, you should rest in the knowledge that God has given you the grace to work diligently and can use your talents mightily. Strive always to do your best, knowing that though you may need to work harder than others, God is sovereign and will use this to make you more like him.

Whether singing a song, cooking a meal, hosting a bridal shower, helping in the nursery, or decorating your home, you can usually find at least someone with more natural talent than you. But if one or more of these things come easily, that is a gift from God, not an indicator of your worth or a tool to secure your salvation. Neither does it mean that God is more pleased with your service if you must work hard.

Romans 14:23 says that anything we do that is
not motivated by faith is sin. Maybe you can sight-read a Beethoven sonata or cook a gourmet meal at a moment’s notice. If you do these things with a sincere heart focused on God, he is glorified. In a similar vein, God does not necessarily take more pleasure when we do things that require more effort, especially if our motivations are not sincere.

**Pride in Parenting**

Many of us struggle with perfectionism in only one area of our lives: our children. Good or bad, our children generally reflect our values and habits, and many of us will stop at nothing to ensure that our children make us look good.

Raising children is a privilege and a serious undertaking, as the Bible often reminds us. The Proverbs admonish us to discipline our children and teach them. The qualifications for church elders set forth in I Timothy and Titus include the ability to manage their children well. We should not underestimate the challenge and importance of parenting our children.

We are often tempted, though, to strive so hard for perfect behavior in our children that we neglect or ignore their heart issues. These may either be the heart issues behind poor behavior, requiring discipline, or a preoccupation with “being good” in hopes of receiving praise, requiring us to help our children better understand their own motivations.
We must remember that only the Holy Spirit can truly change our children’s hearts. Just as our salvation came by the grace of God, so will the salvation of our children. Our children are sinners, just like their parents.

While we cannot change our children’s hearts, life provides us with many opportunities to minister to and teach our children, thus pointing them to the God who can change them. But perfectionists usually miss these chances. We’re so busy striving for well-behaved children who make us look good that, in those messy and disappointing and difficult moments, we fail to point our children to the Savior.

A few years ago at a birthday party with my children, another mother pulled me aside and told me that my child had talked back to her. She was embarrassed to tell me, but as my friend, she said that she would want to know if one of her children had behaved the same way.

As she recounted the situation, I began to realize that although my son had been wrong, my friend didn’t have the whole story. For one thing, she had given him different instructions from what I had told him a few minutes before. And even though he inappropriately asked “So what?” to get clarity from her, he had only repeated something I said often.

This could have been a wonderful teaching moment. It reminded me how my kids often imitate
my behavior. It offered a chance to teach my children the right way and the wrong way to ask questions. It created an opportunity to show them that the words we choose are important, and that they can unintentionally cause offense.

Sadly, I didn’t handle the situation with such a gentle or wise approach. Rather than pulling my son aside and explaining what he had done, I publicly scolded him and made him immediately apologize. I didn’t teach or explain. I swooped in and acted out of shame, with no interest in the state of my child’s heart, but with great interest in the opinion of the other parents. In the end, everyone involved was embarrassed. I worried so much about appearances that I ended up making everybody miserable.

I don’t want to imply that my children are never at fault. Many aspects of this incident did require teaching and even admonishment. But in this case, my son had been guilty of mere carelessness—not the blatant disrespect for which I disciplined him. The scene I caused revealed much more about my own heart than his: clinging to my idol of perfect children, I became angry and defensive, not gentle or restorative. The gospel must go deeply into this mother’s heart so that I can let go my fear of what others think and parent my children with the gospel as well.
It’s All About the Heart

God is more interested in the heart attitudes behind our actions than the actions themselves. We see this in the story of the widow’s mite, found in both Luke 21 and Mark 12. Jesus had been in the temple all day, teaching the gospel and watching the people. He had noticed the rich putting their offerings in the offering box, but when a widow came with two small copper coins, Jesus praised her: Her gift was worth more than all the others because she had given all she had.

We usually hear this story taught as a lesson about giving, and rightly so. But because nothing illustrates the motives of our hearts more than what we do with our money, I think it’s appropriate to also look at this in the context of our actions and even as we consider the idol of perfectionism.

Jesus spoke some of his harshest words for the scribes and Pharisees because they did everything for the sake of appearance. In fact, in the verses immediately preceding the story of the widow’s offering, Jesus says that they will receive great condemnation because they love appearances so much. He says nothing about the quality of the scribes’ work, which probably did look impressive to onlookers. But Jesus objected to the pretense behind that work. The scribes got their pleasure from the praise of others, and Jesus condemned them for it.

Then we get to the widow. Out of all the displays
that Jesus had witnessed that day, he highlighted this one as good. The large gifts of gold placed in the offering box throughout the day did not draw his praise, but the meager gift of two copper coins did, and Mark 12:42 tells us that gift added up to a mere penny. The scribes worried most about how their gifts looked to others, but Jesus cares only for the heart motivation behind a gift.

**Symptoms of Perfectionism**
If your desire for perfection causes you to disregard the heart motivations behind your work or to pursue unreasonable standards, you may be struggling with the same self-righteousness that Jesus saw in the scribes. Like anything else, people struggle with perfectionism in degrees. You may feel the tug of perfectionism in every undertaking, from visible ministry to the state of your sock drawer. Keeping everything “just so” may be such a ruling factor in your life that you constantly feel tired and stressed. Or maybe you are only a perfectionist about one or two things, like your job or your house.

- When company is coming, does your family enjoy the anticipation of opening your home to guests, or do they cringe under your frantic demands to have everything “just so”?
- Are you able to let your children do things for
Perfectionism

themselves, knowing that they will learn and grow in the process, or do you continually step in and take over?

• Have you ever decided not to use some gift or talent because you feared comparison with someone else and falling short?

• Have you ever neglected an important behind-the-scenes duty because you wanted to devote more time and energy to a less important but more public one?

• Have you ever been dishonest about the amount of time and effort you put into a project or ministry, claiming that you just “threw something together” at the last minute when you really worked for hours?

• When it becomes apparent that a project will not go as planned, are you more worried about the opinions of others, or the opinion of the Lord?

It can be difficult to determine when we cross the line from striving for excellence to succumbing to a sinful perfectionism. By the time we reach adulthood, most of us have practiced false humility for so many years that we are quite good at appearing humble when we’re not. Others of us may feel pious because we work harder at some things than other people do, but this is sinful pride. We may not put ashes on our foreheads and announce that we’re
fasting (Matthew 6:16-18), but we still hope our toil will bring us extra favor.

The problem with perfectionism lies in the motivation behind it. You should do your best at work and give your employers the job due them, but if you repeatedly let important tasks slide in order to spend time on unnecessary details, your priorities are unbalanced. If the desire for perfection burdens you to the degree that it causes strain in your relationships, or if you find you have trouble relaxing and not worrying, even after all the important responsibilities in your life have been properly seen to, you may struggle with perfectionism.

**Finding Rest**

Return to the time-capsule house described as this chapter began. The people who worked so hard to maintain it no longer live there. They kept immaculate furniture and carpets but rarely enjoyed them. Perhaps they simply wanted a clean home? Being a good housekeeper is a worthy goal, but if your house is such a shrine that your family cannot relax in it, you need to find a balance in which you and your family can actually live.

I obviously don’t know the motivation in the hearts of the parents who owned that time-capsule house. In the article I read, the sons maintained that this kind of behavior wasn’t unusual in their
neighborhood, which consisted largely of Italian immigrants. Loving family relationships can occur in any sort of physical environment, and tender care in a basement is better than cold neglect in the finest home. Indeed, living conditions in many American basements are still superior to those in many parts of the world.

Nevertheless, I think that house vividly illustrates how the idol of perfectionism is bondage. The sons selling the house said their parents wanted to preserve it for company, but the measures they took to do this prevented their family from living in and enjoying their own home. Maintaining the standard of a perfect home controlled every aspect of their daily lives.

Perfectionism prevents us from living our lives. It prevents us from enjoying our families. It robs us of joy. And most of all, it prevents us from basking in God’s grace and serving in the strength that only he can give. God knows our talents, our energy level, and our resources. He alone is perfect, and he can work mightily, so we can trust him.

**Explore**

1. How can we determine when our efforts have moved beyond striving for excellence to an idolatrous form of perfectionism?
2. Have you ever had something go differently than you planned, only to find that something good resulted from what seemed like a mistake? How might that end result reveal that your original expectations were amiss, or that your original standards were inappropriate?

3. Do you sometimes feel that God finds more pleasure in you when the things He has given you to do go smoothly? How does this square with Scripture, such as John 15:4-5 and Ephesians 6:6?

4. Do you agree that a sinful degree of perfectionism is an attempt to suppress inward chaos? Why or why not? Do your efforts to control things lessen inward chaos or increase it? Think of a specific example from your own life where your attempt to control some situation revealed a lack of faith in God.
ABOUT CRUCIFORM PRESS

What would a book-publishing company for gospel-centered Christians look like if it began with the realities of 21st century technology?

We think it would focus on Content, Simplicity, Reliability, Trust, Convenience, Voice, and Community. Here’s what we mean by that. These are our promises to you.

**Content:** Every book will be helpful, inspiring, biblical, and gospel-focused.

**Simplicity:** Every book will be short, clear, well-written, well-edited, and accessible.

**Reliability:** A new book will be released the first day of each month. Every book will be the same price. Each book will have a unique cover, yet all our books will maintain a distinctive, recognizable look.

**Trust:** If you like this book, then you’re probably a lot like us in how you think, what you believe, and how you see the world. That means you can trust us to give you only the good stuff.

**Convenience:** Our books will be available in print, in a variety of ebook formats, and frequently as audiobooks. Print or ebook subscription opportunities can save you time and money.

**Voice:** We want to know what you’d like to read about, or who you think we ought to consider as an author, or really anything constructive you’d care to say about what we’re doing and how we’re doing it.

**Community:** We want to encourage and facilitate the sense of community that naturally exists among Christians who love the gospel of grace.

JOIN US. Sign up for our newsletter at CruciformPress.com
“As parents, we know God has given us the responsibility to train our children in his ways. But many parents don’t know where or how to start. Tad has done us all a favor by identifying seven key categories of biblical teaching we can utilize in teaching our children godly truth and principles. This easy-to-follow plan will help any parent put the truth of God’s Word into their children’s hearts.”

Kevin Ezell, President, North American Mission Board, Southern Baptist Convention; father of six

“Here is a practical page-turner that encourages fathers to engage the hearts of their families with truth and grace. In an age when truth is either ignored or despised, it is refreshing to see a book written for ordinary fathers who want their families to be sanctified by the truth. Thompson writes with a grace which reminds us that parenting flows from the sweet mercies of Christ.”

Joel Beeke, President, Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary

“Need an introductory text to the topic of discipling children? Here is a clear, simple book on family discipleship, centered on the gospel rather than human successes or external behaviors.”

James M. Hamilton, Associate Professor of Biblical Theology, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary
Our Top Seller

Wrestling with an Angel
A Story of Love, Disability and the Lessons of Grace
by Greg Lucas

The riveting, inspiring true story that readers have called "a touchstone book of my life," and "alternately hilarious and heartbreaking," a book that "turns the diamond of grace in such a way that you see facets you never really noticed before."

“C.S. Lewis wrote that he paradoxically loved The Lord of the Rings because it ‘broke his heart’— and Greg Lucas’ writing does the same for me.”

Justin Taylor, Managing Editor, ESV Study Bible

“Witty... stunning... striking... humorous and heartfelt. Wrestling with an Angel provides a fresh, honest look at one father’s struggle to embrace God in the midst of his son’s disability. Can sheer laughter and weeping gracefully coexist in a world of so much affliction? Greg knows all about it. I highly recommend this wonderfully personal book”

Joni Eareckson Tada, Joni and Friends International

“You will laugh; you will cry. You will feel sick; you will feel inspired. You will be repulsed by the ugliness of sin; you will be overwhelmed by the love of God. Greg Lucas takes us on an unforgettable ride as he extracts the most beautiful insights into grace from the most painful experiences of life.”

David P. Murray, Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary

“Greg Lucas is a captivating storyteller. When he writes about life with Jake, I recognize God’s grace and loving persistence in my life. I want more!”

Noël Piper, author, and wife of pastor and author John Piper
This remarkable volume will inform your mind in a wonderfully biblical way, but also convict your heart, energize your will, and inflame your affections as you contemplate what God has done in making you his child.

Sam Storms, Pastor and author

“We need the ancient wisdom of the Bible, not another glory story from some cool church. Dan has brought us near to the heart of God. As you read, you will sense the need to embrace your own acceptance as God’s adopted child.”

Darrin Patrick, Pastor and author

“Reclaiming Adoption captures the heart and soul of what it means to be a child of God. This isn’t simply a book on adoption. It’s about the reason we were created and how we are to spend the rest of our days loving others.”

Tom Davis, Author of Fields of the Fatherless

“Reclaiming Adoption is a must read. It will tell your head who you are and move your heart to live in response.”

Steve Chong, Director of the Rice movement, Sydney, Australia

Do you doubt God’s delight in you? Understanding God’s adoptive love for you as your Father will free you to live boldly in this world from God’s acceptance, not in order to gain it.

Reclaiming Adoption
Missional Living Through the Rediscovery of Abba Father
Dan Cruver, Editor
John Piper, Scotty Smith, Richard D. Phillips, Jason Kovacs

Also endorsed by Russell Moore, J.D. Greear, Ed Stetzer, Jedd Medefind, Shaun Groves, Burk Parsons, David Evans, Mike Wittmer, Tim Chester, and many more.