

## Seeking Perfection

Every time I read the story of Jesus' birth, I get goosebumps, just thinking about all that Mary and Joseph went through when Jesus was born. They were the epitome of the perfect family, right? Or, were they? You have a mother, that was approximately thirteen years of age, an older man, who is not the father of her child, they are not married under Jewish law, and this child would grow up to be considered a troublemaker by some. So how is that perfect?

Have you ever thought about what your perfect life would be? Would it be having lots of money, hundreds of friends, or perhaps a big house? While you may consider this perfect, would someone else view it the same way? Perhaps they would view it as a terrible life asking why do you need so much money and so many friends? A small house is plenty big. They believe a perfect life is centered around love of their family and friends, so who is right?

What about the baker who knows their apple pie is the most perfect one in the world and enters it into the County Fair, knowing they'll take home the blue ribbon? When the judging is finished and the ribbons are handed out, they are stunned by the fact their pie didn't even finish a distant third. I guess that pie wasn't as perfect as they thought.

I sometimes read in the paper, reviews of restaurants or products, in order to gain a better understanding of how others perceive a meal at a local eatery or the quality of an item I'm thinking about purchasing. But why do I think the reviews of those individuals are going to provide me with the perfect review I need in order to make the correct choice of a restaurant or product? What qualifies them to make such a statement? What may earn a rave review by them may not be the same way I perceive that restaurant or product.

As humans, we are always quick to judge the actions and motives of others, as we seek to find all that is perfect in this world. However, individuals make mistakes, say the wrong things and do the wrong things. Lord only knows, I've made my fair share of mistakes, but the one thing I took from them is, I always learned something from it.

But why do we tend to walk away from a situation that we believe in our eyes is not perfect? Is it because we truly do not know what perfect is, since we've never really seen it? Do we feel we can find that perfection somewhere else? What happens when that perfection is not found? Does God step in or does he leave us to flounder as we continue our quest for perfection?

When I was preparing my sermon, I came across this story written by Stephanie Hanrahan, titled "A Peek Behind the Picket Fence of a Perfect Family".

They say a picture is worth a thousand words, but what exactly are those words? What's the worth of something that's carefully curated, filtered, and posed?

Our most recent family photos were met with many words of praise: "Your children are beautiful!" "You look so gorgeous!" and, predominately, the most gutting: "You have the perfect family."

She states no one could've known I was reading those comments with a pit in my throat, probably from the comfort of my bed, the one I refused to leave even for meals. It would be impossible to predict that behind closed doors I was crumbling; a woman on the verge of a mental break down. One who had spent the last few years trying to save that very same "perfect" family.

I was a wife, mother, sister, and friend to the outside world. I smiled on cue. I showed up to play dates and performed accordingly. I dressed my kids well. I exercised. I indulged in nights out with my girlfriends. I had a husband with a good job, a

pretty home, plentiful vacations. That's what they saw: a life tied up in a nice little bow.

BUT, here's what was really going on behind our picket fence.

My husband, is traditionally handsome and hardworking. A provider, a sacrificial and serving man. He doesn't always have a lot to say, but I suppose it works well for us since I've been given the gift of gab. He's a former athlete, and on any given day, if you saw a photo of him, you'd have no idea he has a failing heart.

My husband flat lined-twice.

In the summer of 2016, I found him unresponsive on our bedroom floor. His heart had stopped, and as it turns out, it is broken beyond repair. We now live in a constant state of limbo: trying to ride his current heart out long enough before he gets a transplant, which is only promised to last time 15-20 years. His condition is

genetic. Our young daughter and son have a 50% change of having it as well.....

No way to see that in a photo.

And then there's my children. My daughter, now four, reads on a third grade level. She spoke in sentences at 13 months old. She remembers every statistic from every show, book, movie or random conversation you've ever had with her. She was scouted by a modeling agency. While other kids cried at new people or places, she ran in with ease. She's an open-armed, loving, intelligent, emotionally feeling girl. She has autism.

No way to see that in a photo.

Next up is my son. He's two years old with a size 11 foot. He's physical, and coordinated, and can kick a ball well into a scholarship future. He's the happiest kid I've ever met and oh so

handsome. He likes donuts and parks, putting things together, and thinks his sister hung the moon. He's a man of few words, like his father, but when he speaks, he means it. I wish I could clone his happiness and drink up his smile, he's magical. And yes, he too has autism.

No way to see that in a photo.

And that leaves me.

It hasn't just been a few years of hiding in plain sight, it's been my entire life. I've always wanted to blend in, and that came at a high cost: never knowing who I truly was. I considered myself a chameleon. You want a bright and bubbly girl? Here she is. Thoughtful and introverted? Coming right up. It was a good trait to have if you wanted to please the masses, but a detriment if you desired real relationships, which I desperately craved. Very

few people actually got a look behind my veil, and that is probably why very few people have lasted in my life.

So here's my real portrait:

I am a child who was abused by her father at three years old. A girl from a small town who developed a great imagination and used it as an escape into the world of reading and writing.

I was a young woman who hopped from relationship to relationship. I loved deeply everyone, except myself. I became a nurse because it was safe. I had a stalker, a professor who propositioned me, and cancer, twice. I moved to a new city on a whim, knowing no one. I was single for the first time in my entire life at 25 years old, and that's when I met my white knight, my husband.



I married, settled into suburban life and had a family. Then I had my daughter, son, and found my husband on the floor almost dead. Perfect, huh?

The day my daughter was diagnosed with autism I opened a private Instagram account just for myself. I used it to post the not-so-pretty. It freed me to be seen and yet still remain unseen.

When comments rolled in about my “perfect” family, I felt so icky about my half-truth life I decided to make the account public. I was shaking as I hit the submit button, but as soon as I saw responses with a resounding message of “me too”, I knew I was finally home.

Life is a funny thing. You see, there are no rights, no wrongs. Our life is a constant journey, where we are always searching for the perfect life, but nothing is perfect here on earth.

It will only be when we are standing at the foot of God, that we will then finally find true perfection.

Amen