

# Grace not Perfection



*embracing* SIMPLICITY, *celebrating* JOY

EMILY LEY

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STUDY GUIDE



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*embracing* **SIMPLICITY**, *celebrating* **JOY**

STUDY GUIDE | FOUR SESSIONS

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WITH BETH GRAYBILL



THOMAS NELSON  
*Since 1798*

*Grace, Not Perfection Study Guide*

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## HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

**THE GRACE, NOT PERFECTION** video study is designed to be experienced in a group setting such as a Bible study, Sunday school class, or any small group gathering. Each session begins with a brief opening reflection and two short “talk about it” questions to get you and your group thinking about the topic. You will then watch a video with Emily Ley and jump into some directed small-group discussion. You will close each session with a time of prayer as a group.

You and your fellow group members should have your own study guides, which include video teaching notes, Bible study and group discussion questions, and between-sessions personal studies that will help you reflect on the material and apply it in practical ways during the week. You are also encouraged to have a copy of the *Grace, Not Perfection* book, as reading the book alongside the curriculum will provide deeper insights and make the journey more meaningful. See the “recommended reading” section at the end of each session for the chapters in the book that correspond to material you and your group are discussing.

To get the most out of your group experience, keep the following points in mind. First, the real growth in this study will happen during your small-group time. This is where you will process the content of Emily’s message,



ask questions, and learn from others as you hear what God is doing in their lives. For this reason, it is important for you to be fully committed to the group and attend each session so you can build trust and rapport with the other members. If you choose to only “go through the motions,” or if you refrain from participating, there is a lesser chance you will find what you’re looking for during this study.

Second, remember that the goal of your small group is to serve as a place where people can share their struggles with perfectionism (or other challenges they are facing), learn about God, and build intimacy and friendship. For this reason, always seek to make your group a safe place for people. This means being honest about your thoughts and feelings and listening carefully to everyone else’s opinion. (If you are a group leader, there are additional instructions and resources in the back of the book for leading a productive discussion group.)

Third, resist the temptation to “fix” a problem that anyone in the group might be having or to correct another person’s theology, as that’s not the purpose of your small-group time. Remember Paul’s words in Ephesians 2:8–9: “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.” Extend *grace* to those in your group, and keep everything the members share confidential. This will foster a rewarding sense of community in your group and create a place where people can heal, be challenged, and grow spiritually.

Following your group time, maximize the impact of the course with the additional between-session studies. This section includes not only personal Bible studies for five days of the upcoming week but also practical tips and tools that you can use to simplify your life and get more organized (without the pressure of feeling you have to be “perfect”!). For each day, you may wish to complete the study and exercises in one sitting or spread it out over the course of the day. Note that if you are unable to finish—or even *start*—your between-sessions personal studies, still attend the group study video session.

You are still wanted and welcome at the group even if you don't have your "homework" done. It's all about grace!

Keep in mind this study is an opportunity for you to learn new patterns of thinking and implement new behaviors that will affect the way you see yourself and your journey with God. The video sessions, discussion questions, and activities are simply meant to kick-start your imagination so you are not only open to what God wants you to hear but also know how to apply it to your life. As you go through this study, be listening for what God is speaking to you as it relates to letting go of striving for the "perfect" life, surrendering complete control to God, building authentic community with others, and just living in God's grace.





## *Session One*

# LET GO OF THE “PERFECT LIFE”

*It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

EPHESIANS 2:8-10



## OPENING REFLECTION

Have you ever felt trapped by your own desire to live the “perfect life”? If so, you’re not alone. That’s actually why we’re here together—to free ourselves from the trap of living the “perfect life” and to embrace the freedom and gift of grace.

In other words, to live a life of *grace, not perfection*.

But this path toward God’s grace and away from our own ideas of perfection isn’t easy. In most cases, it has been engrained in our lives from an early age. Somewhere along the way, someone told us we were not good enough. Or people began to set the standard for us . . . and set that standard *high*. Also, thanks to social media feeds, blogs, and magazines, we mash together everyone else’s highlights and best moments in life and call it *perfection*.

We long for simplicity and joy, but we complicate our lives with comparison and the *not good enough* principle. And busyness—running on adrenaline and lattes—well, that’s the norm in our lives. We’re running so fast that without realizing it, we have decided to let the world tell us what the “good life” looks like.

But the “good life” as a perfectly constructed, magazine-worthy life does not equal happiness. Rather, *the good life is rich, slow, real—and flawed*.

We each have the freedom to live the good life if we choose to embrace *grace, not perfection*. And what is so amazing about grace is that it is *free*—free for imperfect and unworthy people like us. God gave us His free gift of grace through our faith in Him. And He cares so much about us abiding by His commandments, loving big, feeling deeply alive, and being free from the traps of perfection and comparison.

Know this: you are worthy of happiness, and *you are enough*—right where you are, as you are, and with what you already have in your hands and in your homes. You deserve a life full of joy, silly moments, and rich memories. So let's get started and look at a few simple, practical, biblical ways to get away from false ideas of perfection and into the rich life that God intends for you to have.

## TALK ABOUT IT

Welcome to the first session of *Grace, Not Perfection*. If you or any of your fellow group members do not know one another, take a few minutes to introduce yourselves. Then, to get things started, discuss *one* of the following questions:

- What does perfection mean to you? What does grace mean to you?
- What words, situations or scenarios would you use to describe perfection?

## WATCH THE VIDEO

Play the video segment for session one. As you watch, use the following outline to record any thoughts or concepts that stand out to you.

### Notes

*During times of stress, we often kick into “captain” mode: see a \_\_\_\_\_, find a \_\_\_\_\_*

*Definition of stillness:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Grace and only grace offers . . . a deep breath, a place to rest, and the opportunity to slow down and savor what truly matters.*

*Embracing God’s graces gives us permission to:*

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

*God is our refuge (see Psalm 61:2–3). He rescues us from the lies, traps, and pitfalls of perfection and delivers us to the joy and simplicity of peace.*

*How do we really step into this grace, embrace God’s gift to us, and free ourselves from the traps of perfection?*

- \_\_\_\_\_ our standard
- Give ourselves freedom and permission to \_\_\_\_\_
- Allow ourselves to \_\_\_\_\_ wholeheartedly



## GROUP DISCUSSION

Take a few minutes with your group members to discuss what you just watched and explore these concepts in Scripture.

1. *In what areas of your life do you struggle to give yourself grace?*
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. *What areas of your life are you clinging onto too tightly? How is God tugging at your heart and hands to let go of control in these areas of your life?*
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. *Read James 4:6. What does this passage say about admitting our weaknesses to God? What would it look like to step into your “imperfection”?*





## GROUP ACTIVITY

For this activity, you will need a pen or pencil, pictures from magazines that represent current standards of perfection in society (the group leader will provide some old magazines from which you can clip examples), scissors, glue, and paper. Take a few minutes to individually respond to the following questions, and then discuss your answers together as a group.

*Write down three social media feeds, blogs, magazines, shows, celebrities, or places that come to mind when you think about today's standard of perfection. Show examples from the magazines, if you have time.*

*Share one or two reasons why you think people tend to chase perfection.*

*Write down one or two descriptive words of what you want your life to look like—such as peaceful, loving, joyful, fun, free, wholehearted, intentional, and so on. If you have time, cut out pictures from the magazines or materials provided that best represent those words to you.*

*List one specific step you will take this week to guard your heart from perfection, and one specific way you will embrace your imperfections with grace. If there is time (and you feel comfortable doing so), share your answers with your group.*

*I will guard my heart this week by . . .*

*I will embrace my imperfections this week by . . .*

## CLOSING PRAYER

Close your time together in conversation with God. Pray for one another by using the simple descriptive words you shared during group discussion. For example, “*God, we pray for peace in (name)’s life this week.*” You can ask one person in the group to pray for everyone or ask everyone to pray for the person to her right. Ask God to give you the courage and freedom to let go of imperfections, and thank Him for the gift of grace in your lives.





## *Session One*

# BETWEEN-SESSIONS PERSONAL STUDIES

**REFLECT ON THE MATERIAL** you've covered this session in *Grace, Not Perfection* by engaging in any or all of the following between-sessions activities for five days this week. The time you invest will be well spent, so let God use it to draw you closer to Him. At your next meeting, share with your group any key points or insights that stood out to you as you spent this time with the Lord.

## DAY ONE: LET GO OF PERFECTION

*Read Galatians 3:1–14. In this passage, the apostle Paul redefines the standard of perfection for believers in Christ. What stood out to you from Paul's words?*

### *Reflect and Respond*

*Paul states that we achieve perfection by God's grace through our faith in Jesus Christ, not by our own efforts or by trying to do good works. This means there is nothing we can do to reach perfection! Given this, why do you think even Christians often have a distorted view of what it means to achieve perfection?*

*Think about what you discussed this week with your group as it relates to constantly pursuing perfection. Why do you think you chase perfection?*

*Who or what in your life has influenced your ideas or "laws" of perfection?*

*How has chasing these ideas of perfection affected your life? Your loved ones?*

*It's time to let go of false ideas about perfection. In the space below, write a new definition of perfection based on your understanding of Galatians 3:1-14 and what you discussed with your group during this week's session. (For example: Perfection no longer means having the perfect home; perfection now means embracing the mess with a little organization here and there.)*

*Perfection no longer means . . .*

*Perfection now means . . .*

### *Put It into Practice*

Choose one of the following actions that you will put into practice today to help you let go of any false ideas of perfection that may be lingering in your life:

- ☐ **Name it.** List in your journal or on your notes app all the ways you catch yourself trying to achieve perfection throughout the day.
- ☐ **Turn it off.** Turn off social media notifications on your phone. If a friend or family member needs to tell you about their perfect idea for an upcoming party, your phone will ring.



- ☐ **Unfollow or delete.** Certain social media feeds or friends will most likely trigger your desire for perfection. So let them go.
- ☐ **Do nothing.** Be still for ten minutes. Go outside and sit and soak in the world. Clear your mind.
- ☐ **Have fun.** Exercise restraint to clean up immediately after dinner and pause to play a game with your children or your spouse instead. The dishes can wait.

## DAY TWO: EMBRACE YOUR IMPERFECTIONS

*Read 2 Corinthians 12:1–10. If we're being honest with ourselves, we tend to see imperfections as weaknesses. However, in this passage, the apostle Paul speaks of God's power in the midst of our weaknesses. What stood out to you from Paul's words?*

### *Reflect and Respond*

*Note what Paul says about his own weaknesses. In what does Paul say he chooses to boast?*

*Paul talks about a certain "thorn" in his flesh. Why does Paul say it was there?*

*When Paul asks God about his thorn, what does the Lord say to Paul?*

*How does Paul respond back to God when he is given this response?*

*What is a “thorn” of imperfection in your life? How does Paul’s story encourage you today?*

### *Put It into Practice*

Whether we like it or not, our imperfections often drive us to be hard on ourselves and hard on the people we love the most. But when we learn to have compassion and love ourselves well, we start loving our people well too. Put the following items into practice today to help you better embrace your own “imperfections.”

- ☐ **List your imperfections.** Write them down in your journal or on your notes app—all of them that come to mind. Leave space in between each item.
- ☐ **Reframe the conversation.** Think about how you would respond if a friend came to you with this list of imperfections. How would you encourage her? Beside every imperfection on your list, add a phrase of encouragement.
- ☐ **Consider the impact.** Now consider the ways you have sought to get rid of your “imperfections.” Do your cleaning standards match a

five-star hotel experience? Do your meal prep expectations match those of a fancy cooking show? Does your schedule reflect the lives of ten family members when there's only five people in your family? Does your ability to squeeze into size four jeans impact your attitude toward your spouse in the morning? Write down the impact that your quest to be free of imperfections has had on your loved ones.

- ☐ **Love yourself.** Practice some self-care today. Have compassion with your imperfections. Spend time in prayer asking God to help you see yourself the way that He sees you: *whole, perfect, understood, loved, and known*.
- ☐ **Love your people.** Show affection and grace to your loved ones. Make your marriage and your family a priority. Know and understand how each person feels loved, and involve the entire family in loving them well.

### DAY THREE: FIND REFUGE IN GOD

**Read Psalm 61:1–8.** *In this psalm, David speaks of how God is our refuge and our strength. When we seek refuge in Him, He rescues us from the lies, traps, and pitfalls of perfection and delivers us to the joy and simplicity of peace. What stood out to you in these verses?*

Reflect and Respond

Describe a time in your life when you sought God’s strength. How did He respond?

What does it mean to you to find “refuge” in God? What does it specifically look like in your life?

Take an inventory of your life. What lies are you believing about yourself as it relates to your imperfections? What pitfalls have you experienced in your attempts to achieve perfection?

The Lie:	The Pitfall:
The Lie:	The Pitfall:
The Lie:	The Pitfall:

*Where do you want more joy, simplicity, and peace in your life?*

### *Put It into Practice*

Choose one of the following actions that you will put into practice today to help you pursue more joy, simplicity, and peace in your life:

- ☐ **Pursue more joy.** If time together with friends brings you *joy*, invite them over for an impromptu get-together. Set a pretty table. Serve a few fun and simple drinks with a few snacks. Have something for the children to do—a craft, a movie with popcorn, or a fun game.
- ☐ **Pursue simplicity.** If you long for more *simplicity*, consider deleting apps you're no longer using on your phone, and dump out your purse. Throw away trash and create a little bag of essentials: lip balms, tissues, wipes, gum. Make your phone and your bag work for you.
- ☐ **Pursue peace.** It's amazing how a little preparation can bring a lot more *peace* into your life. Buy a few greeting cards. Keep them on hand for birthdays or celebrations that pop up for which you're not prepared.

## DAY FOUR: EXERCISE FREEDOM

*Read Galatians 5:1–26. In this passage, Paul speaks of how Jesus Christ has set us free for freedom—the freedom to love big, live deeply alive, and let go of the weight of perfection and comparison. What stood out to you in Paul’s words?*

### *Reflect and Respond*

*When you accept God’s grace and offer yourself forgiveness, love, and flexibility, you begin to live in his freedom. Where do you need to offer forgiveness today—to yourself or to others?*

*From whom do you need to accept love more freely or give love more freely?*

*What are some areas in your life where you need to be more flexible—to “roll with the punches” as they come your way and not overreact?*

List three ways you will start exercising your freedom today. (For example: I will let go of being so serious all the time and exercise my freedom to have more fun.)

I will let go of \_\_\_\_\_  
and exercise my freedom to \_\_\_\_\_.

I will let go of \_\_\_\_\_  
and exercise my freedom to \_\_\_\_\_.

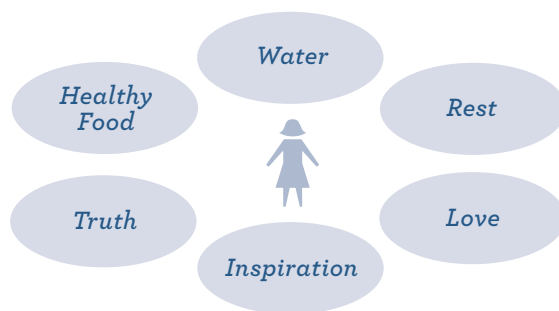
I will let go of \_\_\_\_\_  
and exercise my freedom to \_\_\_\_\_.

### *Put It into Practice*

Did you know that habits and a consistent routine will actually give you the freedom to be more flexible and exercise more creativity? This does not mean that you start to live a rigid or scheduled existence; rather, you start to make consistent and intentional choices as you care for yourself and the people in your life. Choose one of the four simple habits listed below to put into practice today to help you find freedom from false ideas of perfection.

- ☐ **Find a relaxing release.** Allow yourself time to unwind and relax by doing something you enjoy every day. Go to the park with a friend, take a half hour to read a good book (or listen to an audiobook), or do something else fun and non-task related to get your mind off the stress of the day.
- ☐ **Move your body.** The human body needs at least thirty minutes of movement every day, so think of some practical ways you can build simple exercise into your routine. You might not have the time to make it to the gym or do lengthy workouts each day, but you could probably find the time to go on a short walk with your spouse, friends, or kids.

- **Do a brain dump.** Doing a “brain dump” means dumping everything in your mind onto paper. Find some time at the beginning or end of your day to just write a big rambling list. Getting it all out can transfer your roving thoughts onto your to-do list or calendar, remind you of things you need to discuss with others, and help you prioritize tasks for tomorrow. Crossing off these “ramblings” can help you delete them from your mind and make space for rest, relaxation, and calm.
- **Find foods that make your body feel great.** Nourish your body at every meal so you can be at your best. Eliminate foods that make you feel shaky or not quite right and focus on foods that make you feel great—vegetables, fresh fruits, whole grains, and lots of water.



## DAY FIVE: LIVE THE “GOOD LIFE”

*Read Isaiah 26:1–15. In this passage, the prophet Isaiah writes that God keeps us in “perfect peace” when we trust in Him (see verse 3). What stood out to you in Isaiah’s words?*



### *Reflect and Respond*

*What is the connection between trusting completely in God and having peace?*

*How does God bring His peace to those who pursue His ways?*

*What does the life of someone who chooses not to follow God's ways look like?*

*Imagine having a mind, a heart, and a home of "perfect peace." What would this look like in your life as it relates to how you deal with the chaos around you?*

*God's perfect peace in my heart would look like . . .*

*God's perfect peace in my mind would look like . . .*

*God’s perfect peace in my home would look like . . .*

*What are three barriers to “perfect peace” in your life? (For example: an anxious mind, a pleaser mentality, an overbooked calendar, a never-ending stream of activities, temper tantrums of a child, judgmental words from a friend, always saying yes.)*

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

### *Put It into Practice*

Back up and think about a few moments where you lost your inner peace this past week. Choose one of the following to put into practice in the coming week to reduce your daily *frazzle*.

- ☐ **Eliminate your triggers.** Think about what was happening in your life around the times you lost your inner peace. Were the kids acting up before bedtime? Did you hit traffic on the way to work? Did you scroll through social media posts and start comparing your life to someone else’s? Name those triggers by writing them down, and then look for ways to eliminate or avoid them—or, if that is not possible, to at least make them a little less powerful. You could perhaps listen to your favorite audiobook while fighting rush-hour traffic. Or combat the kids’ bedtime antics with dance parties powered by your playlist. Identifying and alleviating these triggers is key to calming your heart and soul.

- **Give your brain a break.** If your brain is constantly on overload, you won't be able to fit any happiness, joy, or calm into it. When your mind is moving ninety miles an hour and you are in crisis mode all the time, you will eventually burn out. So take some time during the day for stillness, quiet, calm—even boredom—to give your mind a break. Turn off the television, put down the phone, take a few moments for quiet at your desk . . . whatever you need to do to just give your mind a break.
- **Pray!** Pray a prayer of surrender and ask God to give you the courage to deal with these barriers of “perfect peace.” Ask Him to help you identify what barriers you can remove or influence, and what barriers may require a new approach. If one of your barriers relates to a person in your life, pray for that individual. Ask God to give you love for that person and wisdom for dealing with the weight of the barrier that he or she brings to your life.

## CLOSING REFLECTION

As you reflect on what God is teaching you through this session, review the introduction and chapters 1–2 in *Grace, Not Perfection*. Use the space provided to write down any key points or questions that you want to bring to the group meeting. In preparation for your next session, read chapters 3–5.